

## 2 Timothy 4:9-22 - Finishing Strong

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[ 0 : 00 ] All right, good morning, everyone.

If you have a Bible, go ahead and turn to 2 Timothy chapter 4.! This morning we're going to conclude our series through this letter of Paul to Timothy.

! And so, we're going to read our passage together, which begins at verse 9. And this is what Paul has to say to Timothy. He says, Do your best to come to me.

For Demas, in love with the present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica. Cretans has gone to Galatia. Titus to Dalmatia. Luke alone is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is very useful to me for ministry.

Titicus I have sent to Ephesus. When you come, bring the cloak that I have left with Carpus at Troas. Also the books and above all the parchments. Alexander the copysmith did me great harm.

[ 1 : 13 ] The Lord will repay him according to his deeds. Beware of him yourself, for he strongly opposed our message. At my first defense, no one came and stood by me, but all deserted. May it not be charged against them.

But the Lord stood by me and strengthened me, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed, and all the Gentiles might hear it. So I was rescued from the lion's mouth. The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed, and bring me safely into his heavenly kingdom.

To him be the glory forever and ever. Amen. Greet Prisca and Aquila, and the house of one Ciphorus. Erastus remained a Corinth, and I left Trophimus, who was ill, and Miletus.

Do your best to come before winter. Let's pray.

Father God, we open your word. Lord, we pray that you would quieten the noise around us. Lord, help us to hear what you say is true about us and about you.

[ 2 : 22 ] Lord, and we pray that by your spirit, anchor us in Christ and lead us in truth today. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen. So I don't know whether you know the film, but in 1990, there was a film released featuring a man called Truman Burbank.

And he lived his whole life in a world carefully constructed by others. And for every friendship, every routine, every comfort, someone else had scripted it.

Someone else had orchestrated it. For decades, he lived in this bubble, in this world, living according to the story that someone else was writing about him. And yet, gradually, surely, slowly, he discovered that there were cracks.

There were some inconsistencies. The rehearsed lines that he woke up to every morning as he left the house. The hidden cameras that he started to find. He begins to ask questions about his identity.

The Truman Show, which is the film, is not just a journey about escaping a fake world. It's about Truman Burbank finding out if he is the true man, Truman. And he's on a journey not to discover really about the fake world, but to discover the truest thing about himself.

[ 3 : 51 ] That's exactly the question that Paul is asking Timothy and us today. What is the truest thing about us? As Paul closes this final letter, something changes in his tone.

And you will have noticed it as we read through it. But up until now, he's been instructing Timothy. He's been exhorting him. He's called him to preach the word and urged him to endure suffering and reminded him to stay strong.

But here in these final verses, Paul stops speaking in principle so much and he starts naming names. Did you notice that? I thought I did quite well.

Until I stumbled over the last few. But look, these aren't ideas, are they? They're not theology. These are people. And it's important because this is where often faithfulness is tested.

Not in kind of abstract beliefs, but in relationships. And by writing this, Paul is not writing a sub-story, right?

[ 5 : 04 ] He's not like, oh, woe is me. Think about my life, Timothy. Timothy, you've had it so good, but listen to my life. He's not saying that. Neither is he listing any of his achievements.

What Paul is doing is showing us the challenges that all of us face, specifically when it comes to relationships, but in the area of identity.

Identity in Christ. This is the theme that we've been looking at through this letter. The challenges to identity in Christ. What happens when all you have is your relationship with God?

And so here we're going to read how deeply the cost of growing the church has been for Paul. But also we're going to see that as life strips things away, those losses expose what we are quietly leaning on.

What are we leaning on today? What are we relying on as true today? What is the truest thing about ourselves? And so he's going to talk about disappointment and how that reveals our hopes were misplaced.

[ 6 : 20 ] He's going to talk about rejection and how it tempts us to retreat from people or to harden our hearts toward people or to redefine ourselves based on what they want us to be so that we can seek their approval.

In other words, when identity is built on people, success, comfort, usefulness, finishing strong becomes almost impossible.

And so follow along with me in verse 9 as Paul then writes about the challenge of the approval of people. He says, Do your best to come to me soon, verse 9.

Now, pause there because Timothy, again, was probably in Ephesus at this time, which is in Turkey. And Paul was in Rome. And you don't have to be a great geographer to know those two places are not close together.

And verse 9 really sums up what it must have been like for Paul to have been away from Timothy. Paul has described him to the church previously as Timothy, our brother.

[ 7 : 38 ] I don't think that's just a passing comment. I don't think that's like a Christianese, oh, brother, you know. Like, I really think that Paul thought Timothy in terms of brotherhood.

Like, I don't think he was simply using this term to describe Timothy as a brother in Christ. Their relationship was deeper than that. Look at what he wrote to the church of Philippi.

In Philippians chapter 2, he says, I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon so that I may be cheered by news of you for I have no one like him who would generally be concerned for your welfare.

For they all seek their own interests but not those of Jesus Christ. But you know Timothy's proven worth. How as a son with a father, he has served me in the gospel.

In Paul's first letter to Timothy, he calls Timothy my true child in the faith. In his second letter we've already seen, he's called him my beloved child.

[ 8 : 48 ] And so being without Timothy, for Paul, where Paul was at this moment in time, was probably a great sacrifice for Paul.

Both in terms of ministry potential on his missionary journey, but also personally. And there's always going to be the danger to fear being alone.

There's always going to be some relationship problem somewhere. You know that. And just because we are sure of our identity in Christ that Paul was, it doesn't ensure unending happiness. Does it? Please say no. Because otherwise I've got it wrong. There's going to be people in your life, there's been people in my life, that will disappoint us, right?

Our spouses will disappoint us, and we them. Our friends will disappoint us, and betray us, and we them. Our children will rebel against us, and we will rebel against our parents.

[ 10 : 06 ] Family members will leave us. And Paul here sends Timothy, brother, son, child of the faith, back to the action.

That's what he's doing. He sent him back, and leaves him alone. He said, the guys in Ephesus, the church in Ephesus, need you more than I need you, and even though this is going to be my loss, you need to go.

And then in verse 10, he highlights, not someone who he has sent back into ministry, but someone who was left altogether. Verse 10, for Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me, and gone to Thessalonica.

And so he, he, he frames, it within these two people. One, whom he dearly loved, and he sent back. And the other, who was left.

And Demas is mentioned actually, in two other letters of Paul. One in Paul's letter to the church of Colossae, and one in Paul's letter to Philemon.

[ 11 : 26 ] And both of those letters were written before this one. So this is potentially Paul's last letter. And, he mentioned how Demas was with him, during that time, and he was sending greetings to them.

And there was no mention in those letters about his desertion. None. And look, as I, as I think about this, this, this tells us that the length of service to God, does not shield us from temptation.

Just because you've been doing it for a while, it doesn't mean that things are going to get easier.

Tim and Sheena will testify to that, no doubt. But what it does do, as in the case with Demas, it reveals where we've quietly placed our trust.

In the same way of years of faithfulness do not exempt us from heartbreak, disappointment, or fatigue. In fact, sometimes the greatest danger comes not at the beginning of the journey, but near the end.

When familiarity replaces dependence. When routine dulls reverence. When we assume endurance will come automatically because it always has.

[ 12 : 52 ] And long, long obedience can breed deep humility. It really can. But it can also conceal slow drift and a subtle leaning on experience instead of grace.

And Paul stands at the end of his life, not as a warning against serving too long, but as a prophetic reminder that no one graduates from the need for grace.

And Demas is an example of someone who was not only walking with God once, but actively serving in ministry alongside Paul, and he couldn't sustain it.

And that should be a warning to us. And so Paul lists these two, these two men, Timothy and Demas. And then he talks about this third character, Cretans.

Who was Cretans? Well, we have no idea. That is the honest truth. He was potentially one of the 70 disciples of Jesus.

[ 13 : 59 ] Traditionally, that's how he is, he is identified. We do know that Cretans was martyred by Emperor Trajan. We know that much in Galatia.

At that time, if you were not a Roman citizen, and you admitted to being a Christian, you were given the option of cursing Christ, or reciting a prayer to Trajan statue, or be executed.

And so the fact that Cretans was executed, tells us that he wasn't a Roman citizen, and he remained faithful to the Lord, even when faced with death. And it says that Cretans had gone to Galatia, and historically, we know that that is where he was executed.

He mentions Titus, who is mentioned 11 times in the Bible, and of course has a book that bears his name, that we'll begin looking at next week. Titus, he is sent to Dalmatia.

Now look, we don't know the circumstances for these guys not being around, but the outcome is the same. Paul felt very alone. And Demas didn't just walk away from the ministry, he walked away from Paul.

[ 15 : 08 ] And that kind of loss can be really wounding. Because when someone leaves, it doesn't just hurt emotionally, it raises a whole bunch of identity questions. Was I not enough?

Did I ask too much? Was this worth it? And the temptation that Paul is highlighting here, I think for all of us, is that when identity is rooted in people, and when people let us down, and they inevitably will, if our identity is rooted in people, their absence can really undo us.

It becomes a real problem. Paul had every reason to grow bitter, every reason to harden his heart towards people, every reason to retreat and say, you know, I'm not going to get close to anyone ever again, because actually all it ends up doing is being carnage and hurt, and thank you very much, but I've had enough of that.

But Paul doesn't say that. And he doesn't say that predominantly, because Paul's identity was never built in the first place, on who stayed. It was built on who called him.

And identity in Christ allows us to grieve loss, without rebuilding ourselves around it. It helps us to deal with the absences of friends, without relying on their presence, to feel that we are accepted and approved of.

[ 16 : 46 ] And so then in verse 11, Paul continues and says, Luke, verse 11, Luke alone is with me. And it's believed that this Luke, is the same Luke, who was with him when he wrote to the church of

Colossae, and to Philemon.

It's Dr. Luke. This is the Luke who wrote more of the New Testament, than anyone else. And I'm reminded, like, what a power team that must have been.

Paul and Luke. Luke alone is with me. And it's almost like he was saying, we're okay. Luke's with me. Dr. Luke is with me. And then he reminds us of the challenge, not of the approval of people, but he reminds us then of the conflict.

And he says there in, towards the end of verse 11, get Mark, and bring him with you, for he's very useful to me for ministry. So Mark is mentioned here almost quietly, right?

This is John Mark. And for Paul, this name carries a significant amount of history. Mark is the cousin of Barnabas.

[18:08] And in Acts, you remember the story, we're told that Mark once traveled with Barnabas and Paul on their first missionary journey to Cyprus.

And it was an exciting time to be with Paul and Barnabas. It was dangerous, no doubt. And it was costly, absolutely, but it was exciting.

But somewhere along the way, Mark faltered. They reached Pamphylia, and Mark said, you know what? I'm going home.

This is too much for me. Maybe I'm homesick. Whatever it was, Scripture doesn't soften it. It just says, he left. And then it moves on.

And again, whether it was fear, whether it was homesickness, whether it was discouragement, or things were just overwhelming, Mark quit when things got hard. And that decision didn't just affect Mark.

[19:14] It sent shockwaves through ministry relationships that lasted for years to come. Because when the time came for a second missionary journey, Barnabas wanted to give Mark another chance.

And Paul wouldn't hear of it. Paul said, no, he's not coming. If he's coming, I'm not going. And Barnabas said, okay.

For Paul, maybe the memory of abandonment was too fresh. Maybe the stakes were too high. Maybe the work too urgent.

But this disagreement became sharp between Barnabas and Paul. And so these, these godly men, and I remind you, they are godly men, filled with the spirit, parted ways.

Barnabas took Mark on his missionary journey, and Paul went on with Silas. And look, no villain is named. No one is declared right or wrong. But listen, the pain is real nonetheless.

[20:22] Even in God's work, relationships can fracture, can't they? People can fail. Which means that calling doesn't insulate us from challenge and heartbreak.

But the beautiful thing is that this wasn't the end of the story for Mark and Paul. Because the gospel is forged not in ideal conditions, is it?

But it's forged in the mess of human weakness. That's what the gospel is. The gospel has come to save. The implication is that we need saving. The gospel does its best work in human chaos, in human mess, in strained relationships.

And so here, Paul says, years later, get Mark. Bring him with you. I've got a score to settle with him. He doesn't say that, does he? He says, he's very useful to me for ministry. You know, there are moments in ministry that I still think about.

[21:41] Conversations I replay in my mind. Decisions I wish I had handled differently. People I loved, but didn't always love well. And I know there's times when I have been more like Mark than I have Paul.

I have failed people. Not because I didn't care, but because I was tired or limited or blind to my own weakness. I've spoken too quickly, listened to little and assumed strength when I should have offered gentleness.

And I've also known the sting of being misunderstood. Moments where I was deeply hurt, where trust was broken, where support I expected didn't come, where I felt exposed and alone.

I carry both sides of that story. And yet, I refuse to believe that failure is the end of the story. And like Paul, I stand here holding onto a quiet, almost stubborn hope that God is not finished with any of us.

that time and grace can soften what pride once hardened. And that even relationships marked by failure are not beyond redemption.

[ 22 : 59 ] And my hope, my prayer, is that God is patient enough to work through our mess, gracious enough to redeem our mistakes, and kind enough that one day we might be useful to one another again.

There's redemption in that, isn't there? That is a God work. That is a gospel work. And then he says, verse 12, Tychicus I have sent to Ephesus.

Tychicus's role seems to have been Paul's personal representative. He delivered both of the letters to, or the letter to Colossians and the letter to Ephesians.

And he probably took Paul's lost letter, which was written to the Laodiceans as well. He was also trusted with bringing back the collection of money that the churches had gathered for the church in Jerusalem.

This is a faithful guy. He is a trusted guy. He served along Paul many years. And he'd been sent, actually, a few years prior to this to deliver letters on his behalf.

[ 24 : 13 ] And I think that as Paul was writing this, I think it's important to say honestly, especially in church contexts, that faithfulness is often lonely. And some of you know this.

You've kept showing up. You've kept serving. You've kept praying. And your identity, if your identity was built on being needed, or your identity was being built on something else, then loneliness would have really crushed you.

But if your identity is built on Christ, on who you are before God, because of God, then loneliness does still remain painful, but it's not fatal.

And so Paul is being sent, sending these, these people all the way around, you know, the globe, it seems.

And Paul is writing honestly, look, that this, if I wasn't rooted in Christ, if I wasn't sure of who I was before God, because of God, these, these issues would have really shipwrecked me.

[ 25 : 28 ] And so then in verse 13, Paul mentions another challenge to identity, and that's one of comfort. And I don't care what you say, we all love a little bit of comfort, don't we? It's funny how that doesn't get much of an amen.

When you come, verse 13, bring the cloak. Now, that is the outer garment. It was used as a blanket. So they would have an inner coat and an outer coat, and the outer coat was a blanket they would use at night.

And what Paul is really saying is simply this, I'm cold. When you boil that sentence down, he's saying, I'm cold. Bring me, bring me my blanket.

He says, when you, when you come, and there's hope there, isn't there? Timothy, when you come, I'm looking forward to when you come, Timothy. But when you do come, here's my, here's my list of stuff to bring. Please write it down.

Please don't forget. Please don't be a typical bloke that gets sent to the Tesco, and then you forget half the stuff that you went for. And you bring half, more stuff that you didn't even need in the first place. Paul is saying, please bring my cloak.

[ 26 : 39 ] I'm cold. The cloak that I left with Carpus et Troas, and also the books, and above all, the parchments. So, so Paul is writing these words, listen from a, a dark, damp, cold prison in Rome.

He's not under house arrest like he was before. This is a different time, different scenario. This is a dungeon. And, I don't think we talked about the dungeon so much through this letter, but, the dungeon was 12 feet underground, and, it was only reached through a small hole in the ceiling. Roman historian, Sallus, wrote that, it was hideous and terrifying due to the neglect, darkness, and stench. The dungeons had no window or ventilation.

The prisoners were chained to stone rings in the wall. In addition, the hole in the ceiling, or in addition to the hole in the ceiling, was a door in the wall that provided access to the city's main sewer, where after execution, they would throw the bodies through that door.

Paul's life at this point is profoundly uncomfortable. In addition to his current surroundings being in a dungeon underground, his body bears the cost of decades spent on the road.

[ 28 : 31 ] He's preached the gospel in hostile places. He's been beaten up more than once, twice, three times, left for dead.

At one time, when he was at Derby and Lystra and Iconium, he got beaten up so bad they thought they killed him. They took him outside the town, put him on a rubbish tip.

He came round, got up, went back into town and started preaching again. He was thrown into prison again and again.

He was part of a shipwreck. Now, that alone would terrify me. He suffered hunger, sleepless nights, long journeys on foot.

He was exposed to dangers such as robbers, his own people, the Judaizers and Gentiles alike. The Bible also suggests that Paul lived with some kind of chronic eye condition that caused pain, limitation and embarrassment.

[ 29 : 41 ] Any one of those experiences would have stopped us doing the things that Paul did. Any one of those experiences could have become his identity.

As he opens the letters, instead of saying, Paul, an apostle, he could have said, Paul, the wounded one, or Paul, the overlooked one, or Paul, the exhausted one.

How often do we say that? How are you? I'm tired. And that starts to become your identity, right? Paul, the man whose body broke down before the work was done.

He could have let suffering define him. He could have said, this is who I am now, tired, forgotten, confined, and spent. But Paul refuses to let the lack of comfort have the final word.

His identity is not a prisoner. His identity isn't a failure. It's not a victim. His identity isn't even in the fact that he's an apostle. His identity is in the fact that he is in Christ.

[ 30 : 52 ] And because of that, even in the cold, even in chains, even with a failing body, Paul is still free to follow Christ. Because his identity is in who he is before God, because of God, not because of his comfort.

Sometimes I think it's true maybe of some of us, probably too often. Our comforts are taken away, and we start complaining, don't we?

And we start whinging, and we start grumbling. And the question is, who are we before God?

And then in verse 14, Paul introduces a new type of relational challenge, challenge, and for you, it may not have been the challenge of conflict or comfort. For you, for Paul, it's opposition.

It's just opposition. Whenever you open your mouth, opposition comes. And so he says there in verse 14, Alexander the copysmith did me great harm.

[ 31 : 58 ] The Lord will repay according to his deeds. And look, Paul was wise enough just to let the Lord deal with him, but the warning is in verse 15 for Timothy to be aware of conflict. He says beware of him.

Don't avoid, it doesn't say avoid him. Don't avoid conflict. You can't avoid conflict, can you? The person who has their identity in pleasing other people tends to avoid conflict at all costs.

Paul doesn't say avoid conflict. He just says beware of it. Beware of it. Don't let it surprise you when it comes. That's what beware means. Beware of him yourself, for he strongly opposed our message.

And while we don't really know who this person is, there is a person who has the same name that Paul refers to in his first letter to Timothy. And he is paired with another guy called Hermeneus.

And so maybe they are the same, maybe they are not. Whether he is or not, the idea is that Paul faced named opposition. Do you notice that? It's named opposition.

[ 33 : 06 ] It wasn't just the state that was coming against him. It wasn't just his own people, the Jews that were coming against him. There was a name coming against him.

Alexander was his name. It was a face. And what he doesn't do is retaliate, right? Like that would be what I would want to do, if I'm honest.

Alexander the coppersmith did me great harm, and I repaid him in kind, would be how it would be written about me. But Paul doesn't write that.

He doesn't take things into his own hands. But listen, he also doesn't bow to whatever Alexander wanted. He's not out to please people. Instead, he entrusts justice to God.

Because when your identity is secure in Christ, you don't have to win every battle. You don't need to prove yourself. You can leave room for God to do whatever God decides to do with that.

[ 34 : 17 ] And then he says in verse 16, at my first defense, no one came to stand with me or by me, but all deserted me. So now even, you know, Luke who was there, Tychicus who he had sent, Timothy who he had sent, Demas who was previously with him, he's saying actually all of those guys, none of those guys were with me in my first defense.

May not be charged against them, but the Lord stood by me and strengthened me so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it, so I was rescued from the lion's mouth.

Look, these are two remarkable verses that we don't really have a huge amount of time left to go into, but look at verse 16, at my first defense, no one came to stand by me.

Can you imagine? He says, not just that, all deserted me. Here is a guy who had touched hundreds of thousands of people's lives and who was there to support him.

Now you might say, no one. I would disagree because there was one and that was Jesus. and that's all he needed.

[ 35 : 34 ] He's not saying, oh, poor, poor, Paul, all my friends have gone. He's not saying that. He's saying, I only needed one.

I only needed one friend, and that was Jesus. Jesus. And this occurrence where he talks about my first defense is a technical term for a courtroom.

That term where he says, no one came to stand with me, is another courtroom term for someone who testifies on your behalf. And probably what Paul is referring to is when he gave his formal defense, the first time round to the rulers, they included Felix and Festus and King Agrippa.

That's when he was at house arrest. That was the first time round. And they agreed, do you remember they agreed that Paul was innocent of any serious charge, that it was really, the charges against him were theological rather than insurrectional.

So despite the verdict of innocence, Paul had already appealed to Caesar as a Roman citizen. And so he was already on his way to Rome, being sent to Rome to stand trial.

[ 36 : 49 ] And so the first defense that Paul is alluding to seems to be the defense he gave to Felix, Festus, and King Agrippa. And during that time he says that he was aware of two things.

Number one, he was aware that none of his friends came to his aid. But he was also aware of the Lord's presence. And look, you may feel unsupported at times and you need to know that you're never unaccompanied.

You might feel lonely at times, but you're never really alone. And of course, you know, Jesus knows this road, doesn't he?

He had been abandoned too. He too had looked his betrayer in the eyes. They had a face. Forsaken by his friends.

Rejected by the authorities and his own people. And because he stood faithful to the end, what does that mean? Well, it means that we're never alone.

[ 38 : 00 ] And then finally, he writes about a challenge of death itself. Up until this point, the narrative has been fairly negative.

There's not a huge amount of positive things that we take away, is there? But here in verse 18, Paul kind of turns that on its head and he says, the Lord will rescue me from every evil deed and bring me safely into his heavenly kingdom, to him.

Be the glory forever and ever. Amen. There is an ever and ever. Do you know that? There's a forever and ever that lasts way beyond this life.

And Paul is not naive to that. He knows that execution is likely. He knows that it is imminent. And yet, he's unafraid.

Why? Because his future is already secure. God is not the gospel settled his identity long before circumstances collapsed.

[ 39 : 15 ] The gospel settled his identity on the road to Emmaus. And that's how you finish strong, not by avoiding loss, but by anchoring hope beyond it. Where is your struggle today?

Where is the loneliness today? Don't anchor it here on other people, anchor it in Christ, who was set up for you. As Paul describes in that verse, safely into his heavenly kingdom.

And then in verse 19, towards the end of the passage, Paul signs off his letter, and he reminds us that there is something ordinary about faithfulness.

There's nothing extraordinary about faithfulness. Faithfulness is in the ordinary, in the daily. He says, Greek, Prisco, and Aquila, and the household of one Ciphorus. Erastus remained at Corinth, and I left Tromethus, who was ill at Miletus.

Do your best to come before winter. He has a cloak that he wants to bring. If you can, come before winter.

[ 40 : 28 ] It gets cold in this dungeon. Eubulus sends greetings to you, as do Pudins, and Linus, and Claudia, and all the brothers.

Names again, mostly who we don't know, but they're greetings, they're family. There's no fireworks, there's no dramatic finale, there's no pregnant pause, these are just names that Timothy would

know, and they highlight for us faithfulness.

And again, we're reminded that the Christian life isn't about how loudly you start, but about who you trust when everything costs you, when all of your identity and other things are stripped away.

He says, the Lord be with you, will be with your spirit, grace be with you. And so, Paul doesn't leave us with a strategy for success or formula, for comfort. He gives us a life marked by loss, by rejection and hardship, and yet anchored deeply in Christ.

And the invitation really, you know, is for us to do the same, is to not allow this world or your wounds or your weariness or your weakness rewrite who you are in Christ.

[ 41 : 48 ] So super easy, isn't it? to let our disappointment name us or to let our failure define us or to let rejection shrink you and to shrink God.

Your identity and my identity was given to us in Christ, sealed by his cross, secured by his resurrection and sustained by his grace and to live unashamed is not to deny pain, is not to pretend that it doesn't exist, but it's to refuse to let pain and sorrow and struggles and challenges have the final word.

it is to take up again and again the truest thing about you, that you belong to Jesus, that you are loved by him and your life, however hidden and however costly, is held securely in his hands and from that identity you can finish strong.

Let's pray. Father, we come to you, Lord, not as people who have it all together, not as people who have it all right, but we come to you as a people who belong to you, who have been named by you, who have been fashioned and formed by you.

Lord, we want to confess so many times even this week, there has been challenges to conform to the things of this world to be shaped by, to be formed by, to be named by, whatever has come up at the moment.

[ 43 : 48 ] Lord, we are so thankful, Lord, because of the work of Jesus on the cross. You have not left us in solitude, but you have called us into family.

Lord, thank you, Lord, that because of your work on the cross, because of the good news of Jesus, you name us differently than how the world names us.

God, you have created a reality for us, where our sins are forgiven, completely, forever, where healing is a process with a promise at the end, not just therapy.

that freedom is the ability to live in that identity, not without constraint.

Lord, and yet so often we forget that. Lord, and we pray as we draw this letter to a close, you would help us to live in the identity that you have won for us.

[ 45 : 11 ] That we don't work towards the cross, we don't work to seek your approval, to gain your approval, to do things by works. Lord, we come to you and we confess our weakness, we confess our failures and our sins, and we embrace everything that you have accomplished for us.

And we live as your word says, standing in your presence. Even right now, that's how you see us. Completely whole, completely restored, completely loved.

Thank you, Lord, that you don't just forget our sin, but you have paid for our sin. Thank you, Lord, that we can stand in front of you, Lord, not in our own goodness, goodness, but in the clothes that you have dressed us in, in your goodness.

And you accept us as your children on that basis. So help us, Lord, as we are tempted and challenged to conform to this world, to seek the approval of people, to change who defines us, to soften our words, to please others.

Help us, Lord, we pray, to be like Paul who was able to say, everybody else has left me, but you are enough. Lord, we pray this in Jesus' name.

[ 46 : 56 ] Amen. This morning we are going to break bread together together. desde! desde! desde! desde! desde! desde! desde! desde! desde! desde! desde! desde! desde! desde! desde! desde! desde!