

ONESIPHORUS

By Don Krider

I believe we need to take examples in the Bible and begin to study them; begin to see what faithfulness really is about. There is one man that we never hear much about; his name is Onesiphorus, which means, "profit bringing." If there was ever an example and a model for the church, he is it. Paul speaks of him in 2 Tim 1:15-18. This is by Paul's own testimony. This is by the hand of one that Onesiphorus ministered to again and again. In verse 15, Paul is talking about the people who forsook him, but Onesiphorus was faithful to him.

2 Tim 1:15: "This thou knowest, that all they which are in Asia be turned away from me; of whom are Phygellus and Hermogenes. (16) The Lord gave mercy unto the house of Onesiphorus; for he oft refreshed me, and was not ashamed of my chain: (17) But, when he was in Rome, he sought me out very diligently, and found me. (18) The Lord grant unto him that he may find mercy of the Lord in that day: and in how many things he ministered unto me at Ephesus, thou knowest very well."

Paul prayed: "The Lord give mercy unto the house of Onesiphorus." I thank God for that. I would like that prayer to be a prayer that is prayed for me every day. I don't know about you but I need mercy. The reason Paul is saying this is: "for he refreshed me." How many people have we refreshed? In the midst of all the people who are going on their own way and leaving Christ, there is a group of people who are faithful. There is a group of people who are steadfast, a group of people who desire to be givers.

Acts 20:35 says: "I have showed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive."

This is examination time; I decided to find out where we really are, what we really want. We are always looking for the BIG ministry; we are always looking for the miracle. We are always looking for that ministry that's going to be noticed by everybody. But the servant's heart never looks for that. The faithful man never looks for that. The faithful person looks for opportunity to serve.

What we need in the house of God are servants. We don't need lords and masters; we need servants. We have plenty of people who can tell you how to do it; we need a few who can show us how to do it. Every day of our life we ought to make a desirous choice in our hearts to be faithful servants. Paul is saying, "Listen, I want the mercy of God to be on the household of Onesiphorus, because, first of all, he refreshed me."

How many people are glad to see us come; how many people are glad to see us go? There are a lot of people just glad to see us 'gone.' But wouldn't it be nice if somebody would say about us, "My prayer for you is mercy on your household because you have refreshed me. You were there when I needed you. You made the phone call when I was down. You spent the time to write a little note when I was sick. You spent the time to come by, lay hands on me, and pray for me. You spent the time to put a little money in my pocket when I was broke."

Gal 6:10 tells us to do good to all men, but especially to those of the household of faith. What we need to

see in the church is not a great powerful unit but a servant unit, because the power is in service. "He refreshed me." Paul was in need of refreshing; he was in prison. In those days they did not have a government dole out. If you went to prison you had better have a few friends and relatives on the outside to feed you and put clothes on your back, or you were going to starve and freeze to death. This isn't something you go to Bible school to learn. This isn't something you have to go to forty-five classes to figure out. This is, "do it." Every one of us can do this.

"He refreshed me. He was not ashamed of my chains." He identified with Paul in his affliction; he identified with Paul in his needs. He didn't go hide. He didn't go off to some place and say, "Well, it's too bad. If he had just been a little more compromising; if he had just been a little more understanding; if he had just kept his mouth shut, Paul would not be in this kind of trouble."

We have a lot of those people. They can tell you what would have happened if you hadn't done something. But I want to tell you, we need to identify with one another in our need and in their need. We need to mourn with those who mourn and rejoice with those who rejoice. If any member of the body hurts, we all hurt. We have become so independent in our thinking that we are not a family. We are just scattered members all over the country. We don't feel the hurt; we don't reach out and really minister to the need of an individual's life.

It's not great preaching that brings mercy in your life. It isn't great Bible teaching. It's great service. It's humbling ourselves under the mighty hand of God. It's reaching out to an individual in their need. He not only refreshed him, but he wasn't ashamed of his chains. "When he was in Rome, he sought me out."

A lot of times, we will go to somebody's place if it's not inconvenient; but when it takes a little of our time; when it takes a little of our expense; when it takes a little effort to find out where they are, we won't go. "Well, we will see them at church Sunday. " We don't see them at Church Sunday. "Well, they will be here next Sunday." Next Sunday we read about them in the obituary column; they passed away two weeks ago. "We didn't know; nobody called." No, because they were all alone.

I think one of the greatest ministries in the body of Christ is the ministry of a servant. Not only did he refresh him, he said he identified with him. "He sought me out. He knew I could not come to him, so he came to where I was." Jesus said these words, ***"I was sick and you visited me; I was in prison and you came to me." And they said, "Lord, Lord, when did we see you in prison; when did we see you naked; when did we see you sick." He said, "When you have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, you have done it unto me" (Matt 25:34-40).***

Giving an offering is nice but it kind of insulates us sometimes. I can give a dollar, ten dollars, a hundred dollars, a thousand dollars, and never be involved with anyone. But I can't get on that telephone and call you up and not get involved in some way with you. I can't have a personal interaction with you without being involved with you.

How little effort is put forth in seeking the well being of others. We seek for our well being;

we tell God all the time what we need. "Lord, I need this for my ministry. I need this so people would understand I'm a great minister." I want to tell you something: be a great servant. Be a person who says, "I want to refresh the body of Christ. I want to refresh that sick member. I want to refresh that one who is downtrodden. I want to refresh that one who is suffering affliction this morning. I want to seek them out."

How do you seek them out? First you start praying for them. If you don't pray for them, you don't care about them anyhow. *1 Tim 2:1 says: "I exhort therefore that first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men."* Lifting one another to the throne of grace, getting involved with their need, being a refresher. There's a guarantee that when you need mercy it shall be there. "He refreshed me. He was there when I needed him."

In 2 Tim 4:2, Paul said that Demas and others had forsaken him, and in verse 16 he said that at his first report all men forsook him. But here's a different report about Onesiphorus, isn't it. I don't care how funny your name may sound; it has nothing to do with your standing with God. Onesiphorus showed up when Paul needed him. He didn't find him easy; he had to seek him out. I don't think he went to the Hilton to look for him; he went to the jailhouse. He began to refresh him.

"He sought me out very diligently, and found me." He didn't say, "Well, I went to Rome and I tried to find Paul, but I couldn't find him the first day so I took a vacation". No! He became diligent about the way that he sought Paul out. He began to look for him everywhere. He desired to refresh him. He desired to touch his life. We would be a lot happier if we were touching people's lives. We would be a lot happier if we were refreshing people.

When he came into that prison and he saw Paul in chains, he kept on ministering to him. He didn't criticize him; he didn't become critical of him. He didn't say, "If you had done this you wouldn't be here. If you hadn't done that you wouldn't have been here." What did he do? He went right in there where he was and began to identify with him. He diligently sought him out and he refreshed him.

Jesus told Peter in *Luke 22:31-32: "Simon, Simon, Satan hath desired to have you that he might sift you as wheat but I prayed for you that your faith would fail you not, and when you are converted,"* underline it, "strengthen the brethren" Don't worry about going out and buying a big auditorium to preach in, renting a big tent, or getting a big program on television or radio. We need to get personally involved with one another. We need to be strengtheners; we need to be refreshers.

How much of a strengthening was it when Onesiphorus came into that prison cell and saw Paul? I believe there was a time when all of the money in the world could not buy what it meant face to face. John said, "*My joy shall be made full when I see you face to face*" (2 John 12).

The joy that we are lacking many times is because we've isolated, insulated ourselves into a world, and we're so busy making a living. How many things do you suppose we could do without? We need to be refreshers, we need to be strengtheners, and we need to be very diligent in seeking out those that are hurting among us. Every one of us could call two people a day; that would be 60 people a month. Our call might inspire them to call two people a day. Before long the Churches would be full, and when they came to Church they knew they would be refreshed, they would be challenged, they would be strengthened.

The Church has to get involved on a one on one basis. We've got to begin to be involved in one another's lives, not busy-bodies, not sticking our nose into people's business, but being like Onesiphorus, a refresher. It doesn't refresh people when you come and bring judgment on their heads and tell them what's wrong with them. It comes when you lift into their hearts the Christ that lives in them. That strength that they have need of today is not for somebody to push them down but somebody to pick them up, somebody to encourage them in the hour in which we live.

Jesus said, "**Strengthen the brethren.**" Onesiphorus was fulfilling the call of God probably more than a lot of ministries have ever fulfilled the call of God. He was fulfilling the commandment of the Lord. "**...When you are converted.**" Maybe that's our problem. There is a lot of difference between being saved and converted. Salvation is instantaneous; that's the day you say, "Yes, Lord." But conversion is a process; laying aside things, putting on new things; taking off the old and putting on the new.

We need to be strengtheners, refreshers, very diligent to seek out those that are in need. Not just to say, "Well, it's too bad they missed Church today; maybe the pastor will call them. Maybe we can elect a committee to call the sick." Where do you find that in the Bible? This is a personal word of instruction to every individual in the body of Christ. I have a commandment, you have a commandment, but it's all the same. We're to be strengtheners of the brethren.

We can't just look at this thing and say, "Well, it was nice to have them for awhile; now they are gone. God bless them." No, no, no. You don't even know why they are gone. Then you get religious and quote scripture like, "If they had been of us, they would not have gone out from us." You know, we just get all kinds of stuff going on in our religious minds. We are missing them, but we are not diligent to seek them out. We are not diligent to find out why they are not here with us. We need to find out where they truly are and what need they are in.

I had a man tell me one time, "Brother Krider, you said if I do that it may cost me something. I know they are always needing money." I said, "Don't call them; your heart's not right." God gives power to get wealth, not to keep it, not to store it up, not to get big interest on it, but to give it to those who have none; to be a sharing people; to be a people who have no member in need or in lack but every member having his needs met. Christ ministers through His body.

We need to be a people today who are saying, "This is a commandment from God that I strengthen the brethren." Now here is an example of how you can do this. Ask yourself "Am I a refresher?" Sunday morning is the best time because that is when most people show up for Church. "But am I really a refresher? Am I one that comes along and strengthens a brother or a sister that is really in need? How diligent am I about this business? Does it really make a difference? I'm putting my time in Church. I'm not cussing and swearing; I'm not doing those nasty things. I'm O.K." God says, "How many have you refreshed? How many have you strengthened? How many lives have you really touched?"

We talk about evangelism out there in the world but the evangelist was sent to the body of Christ, not to the world. *Eph 4:11-13 says: "And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ:"* The evangelist was one of the five-fold ministries, and that was to challenge, to stir us up, to get us to thinking right.

God is saying that what we need today are refreshers. Every one of us can be a refresher, and we can make a few more. Sometimes we get out that Church door as quick as we can. We are afraid to ask someone how they are feeling today, because if they need help, it's going to take a little time to pray for them and we are in a hurry to go eat, or hurry home to watch TV etc. We have dissected the Church. We have put it into our perspective and into our operation, and it doesn't even resemble the Church much anymore. The Church began by praying for one another, by sharing with one another, by giving to one another, until all men had their needs met.

When the Downtown Church first started it was a crazy Church. We had all kinds of people come in. There was a hotel close to the Church that was full of homeless people and they came. We had jailbirds, we had Christians, we had strange people. We would take up the offering and then pass it back out again. We would announce that if somebody needs something, take it out. We really operated by faith because, most of the time, nothing came back.

There were people at that door every night that we were open. The Church was packed with people who wanted a touch from God. Sure, some started out as shysters, but some of them gave their hearts to Christ. Some of them found the reality of serving God. It wasn't just a bunch of people who were self-centered. It was a bunch of people who were Christ centered, and who were willing to give of their substance without question until the need was met and until people were ministered to.

"Let mercy be on the household of Onesiphorus." I need mercy. ***"Blessed are the merciful for they shall obtain mercy" (Matt 5:7).*** It's kind of a seed thing, isn't it? If you don't sow mercy you don't get any back. Whatever crop you sow is what you reap. I would rather be a sower of mercy, and grace, truth, and love.

So Paul said, "Mercy on the household of Onesiphorus because he refreshed me." Just being around him was refreshing. Wouldn't that be wonderful if everybody around you just got refreshed? People were just so glad to see you come. People were just so glad to have you around because you refreshed their lives.

Look at this, "He was not ashamed of my chains." Somehow we want to walk around with perfect people. We want to be associated with perfect people. You know, that's perfectly absurd because there are no perfect people, so you might as well start ministry where you are. You don't need to go to a four-year Bible college for this. It's a quick way; it's die to self. I've said this for years: "The deader, the better."

We finally realize that we are not living just to satisfy ourselves. We are not just working to satisfy ourselves. We are not just involved with life to satisfy ourselves, but we are there for the needs of others. We are there because other people need us. If we are not needed, pretty soon we will become lonely. The most unhappy people in the world, the most depressed people in the world, are people who are not involved with other people. God made us to interact, just as a body interacts with itself.

Paul said, "I want Onesiphorus' household to be blessed; to be refreshed. He was not ashamed of my chains. When he was in Rome, he sought me out and very diligently found me. The Lord grant unto him that he may find mercy of the Lord in that day." So Paul's prayer wasn't just for mercy at that moment, but it was mercy any day of his life. It was mercy in the day of the Lord when he was called before Christ.

You see, when you began to strengthen one another, when you began to refresh one another, there is not an end to it. It's like planting living plants that just start growing. I don't want to be a lonely person. I don't want to be a bitter person. I want to be an involved person. I want to interact with people. I want to reach out to people.

The world is a lonely place. The loneliest people in the world are drunk, they are on drugs, or they are on something, trying to be refreshed. Most of them are not trying to kill themselves; most of them are just trying to find some company. But I want to tell you, it's bad when the Church is lonely. All it takes is a phone call to "reach out and touch somebody." I think that ought to be the Church's slogan. The Church has always been the one to reach out. You and I are alive in Christ; we can reach out, we can touch somebody. We can pray for a person, we can encourage a person; we can do whatever they need, because God made us that way.

So Paul said, "Not only do I want him to find mercy now in this household, but I want him to find mercy in the day of the Lord." What a prayer! He didn't say that about Demas and the others who forsook him. He said, "I pray God that it may not be laid to their charge." But of Onesiphorus he said, "I would like to have mercy for him now, and mercy for him then." Why? I don't think he came down there and preached a big sermon to Paul. I believe he refreshed him, became a friend to him, probably laid hands on him and prayed for him.

You may think that Paul didn't need anybody to pray for him, but leaders need more prayer than anybody else, believe me. Look at these words now, "The Lord grant unto him that he may find mercy of the Lord in that day; and in how many things he ministered unto me in Ephesus, thou knowest very well."

We do it not to be seen, we do it not to be heard, we do it not to be recognized, but we do it because it's in our hearts to do it. We want to have every brother and sister touched by the power of God. We want every brother and sister to be ministered to, but it takes time to do that. Paul said, "You know how many things he did for me."

In Matt 6:3,4,6,17,18 Jesus said to do three things in secret: give, pray, and fast. It doesn't mean just giving money. It means your good works; whatever you do, let it be in secret and "God who sees in secret shall reward thee openly." If you're refreshing people, it's not long until some of them show up. If you're refreshing people, it isn't long until they have a smile on their face.

Suppose you were in a desert, no water anywhere, and all of a sudden a guy appears and he has a leaded goblet worth thousands of dollars, but there is nothing in it. The guy is well dressed and he says, "If you had made provision for your journey you would have had water to drink, but here, have a leaded goblet." Then here comes a guy who is not dressed very well, he doesn't have much, but he has an old tin can and in that old tin can there is cool water. He says, "I don't want to give you a can but I want to give you the water." Now which one of those guys refreshed you?

Remember the story of the Levites and the priest who came by and rejected the one who fell among thieves. The Samaritan came by and got involved. Which one do you think refreshed him? I'm telling you, saints, there is a great ministry that is not crowded at all - just a great ministry. A lot of people are shooting for a great ministry, and are killing themselves trying to get there. A lot of people are doing a lot of things and are just wearing themselves out. But here is the ministry that is hardly crowded at all: **strengthening the brethren**. The ministry of refreshing, the ministry of strengthening, the ministry of just being there, the ministry of just showing up when somebody needs help. The ministry of getting on the phone and saying, "I was concerned; I didn't see you today. I didn't see you this week. Are you all right? I just wanted you to know that we love you and that we care about you."

That is the ministry that will build the Church. Great preaching does not build Churches. Great involvement by people will build Churches. I believe there is room for every one of us to be a strengthener today. I believe there is room for every one of us to be a refresher today. I want mercy for my household and I want mercy for me in that day. I want to be known as a refresher, not a great preacher, not a great Bible teacher, but let me be known as a refresher and I will be happy.

We all need to get involved with one another, even deeper than just a Sunday morning,

Sunday night, Wednesday night thing; deeper, deeper, deeper, until if one person is missing we all notice it and we all begin to inquire about that individual.

Maybe you are lonely. Maybe you have been a person who has tried to find your own way and work it out your own way but it doesn't work. Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and the Life; no man comes to the Father but by Him. So if you are reading this and you would like to accept the Lord Jesus Christ as your Savior and have your sins forgiven, just pray and admit that you are a sinner, and ask Jesus to become your Savior. The Lord will accept you into His family, and you can begin to be what God intended you to be from before the foundation of the world. Amen!