

# BELONGING WITHIN LONELINESS

*2 Timothy 4:9-22*

**H**igh school yearbooks traditionally feature prominent photos of senior class members, accompanied by lists of their school activities. Some seniors have seven or eight lines of club memberships, while others show only one organization or maybe none. Multiple lines may indicate that the student was a leader. On the other hand, they may indicate only that the student was a “joiner” who signed up for club after club simply from a need to belong.

We all want to belong, but the sensation of belonging may have nothing to do with how many clubs we join or how many people we have around us. Belonging is deeper than mere association. Even in a Roman prison, Paul experienced the reality of belonging to Christ and to his fellow believers.

**Group Discussion.** What are some things that give people a sense of belonging?

**Personal Reflection.** What has given you the deepest sense of belonging?

So far as we know, 2 Timothy is the last letter Paul wrote. Imprisoned in Rome under the persecution of Emperor Nero, he believed that his life was near its end. He wrote to Timothy, a young believer who had become one of his missionary traveling partners (Acts 16:1-3). Paul was very close to Timothy, addressing him in his letters as “my true son in the faith” (1 Timothy 1:2) and “my dear son” (2 Timothy 1:2). This letter is an open door into Paul’s heart toward the end of his life. *Read 2 Timothy 4:9-22.*

1. Paul wrote this letter while imprisoned in Rome. On a Bible map, trace the various places his companions have been scattered.

2. In verse 9, Paul urgently pleads for Timothy to come to him. What reasons do verses 10-15 offer for that plea?

3. Consider the requests in verse 13. What do they reveal about Paul's physical and emotional condition?

4. What legitimate reasons would Paul have to feel abandoned?

5. When have you felt abandoned, so you can identify with Paul's experience?

6. When have you felt that you belonged, even when you were alone?

7. How does Paul express trust in the Lord concerning those who have opposed and deserted him (vv. 14-16)?

8. The Lord stood by Paul and strengthened him so he could continue proclaiming the gospel to the Gentiles (v. 17). How does seeing God's purposes in your life help you cope with a sense of being alone?
9. When have you been most keenly aware that you belong to Christ?
10. How does Paul's ultimate hope (v. 18) reveal his certainty that he belongs to Christ?
11. What gives you the greatest certainty that you belong to Christ?
12. If any sense of being abandoned hits you this week (or further in the future), what will be your strategy for coping with it?



*Honestly express to the Lord your need for belonging and any feelings you have that you do not belong. Pray for an ever increasing certainty that you belong unshakably to Christ.*

#### NOW OR LATER

Study Psalms 41–44, prayers of people who reach out to God in the face of abandonment and betrayal.