



## Two Good Men

Series: *Philippians – To Live Is Christ*

Philippians 2:19-30

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Everybody has heroes, people they look up to, people they desire to emulate. For me, growing up, it was my two brothers. Of course, I had my favorite pro athletes – Jack Lambert, Johnny Bench – but being four and five years younger than my brothers, they were my heroes. They were both excellent students, both standout athletes. They were civic minded, well respected in our school and town, principled and generally good guys and I got to observe them up close every day. I can remember putting on their football jerseys when no one else was in the house and practicing my game face in front of the mirror. When my brother Jake went fishing, I was the first one to beg to go along and more often than not, he took me. When my brother Dan started wearing a rope as a belt, I did the same thing. Everywhere they went and everything they did... I wanted to do it too. They were living, breathing examples to me and they gave me a good pattern to follow. That's what we have before us in this text. Paul holds forth Timothy and Epaphroditus as living examples of two men who were actively working out their salvation in real ways – the very thing to which he has been calling us.

The text that we are looking at today takes on a decidedly more personal tone from what we have been reading before. Since verse 27 of chapter 1, Paul has been describing to us what it looks like to **“let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ... standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel...”** (Philippians 1:27, ESV) In doing this, he encouraged us to be fearless, to suffer for Christ if need be and to engage the good fight of faithfulness to Christ. He then went on to talk about how we are to live out our faith in regard to the fellowship of believers, to **“complete (Paul’s) joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do(ing) nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count(ing) others more significant than (our)selves.”** (Philippians 2:2–4, ESV)

Driving this point home, Paul unfolded the ultimate example of this kind of life in the humiliation and exaltation of our Lord Jesus Christ, tying high theology and Christology to very practical matters of living, right? Then he called us to be about the hard work of working out our salvation in **“fear and trembling,”** so we would not fail in our calling to shine as lights for the gospel, to shine as lights for God’s glory, in the midst of a darkened, crooked and twisted generation that needs a Savior, a generation out of which God has saved us by His Son. This has all been very intense stuff, right?

But now, in this text, Paul turns to some seemingly ordinary matters about sending Timothy and Epaphroditus to the Philippian church, about his hope for his release and his desire to visit them if he is released from prison. As Paul moves from such high theology to logistical matters, it may make you wonder why it is that God would include such information in the Scriptures. But as we look at this, we need to see how the Holy Spirit uses even such seemingly ordinary matters as an excellent way of illustrating the truths that Paul has been presenting in this entire chapter. These two good men, whom Paul praises to the Philippian church, Timothy and Epaphroditus – one eventually a pastor and the other a church member – are two men worthy of emulation as we serve Christ and work out our own salvation with fear and trembling. Before we look at each of these men as Paul commends them, let’s first set the context, the divine logistics of Paul’s travel plans.

**Divine Logistics (19, 23-24)** Paul writes in verse 19 and then verse 23-24, ***“I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, so that I too may be cheered by news of you... I hope therefore to send him just as soon as I see how it will go with me, and I trust in the Lord that shortly I myself will come also.”*** (Philippians 2:19, 23–24, ESV) Then later he says in verse 25, ***“I have thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus...”***

So what is the plan here? Paul’s plan was to send Epaphroditus back to Philippi with this letter that we are reading, in hand, to deliver to the church and to have it read to the congregation. That meant that there would be no response to the letter since Epaphroditus would remain with the church. Therefore, Paul would send Timothy to Philippi next, just as soon as he found out how his trial in Rome was going to go. Timothy could inform the church about disposition of Paul’s case – he was hoping for release and an opportunity to see the Philippians once more. And then, Timothy could then come back to Paul, as he was hopefully on his way to Philippi, and report to him how his letter was received, how the

Philippians were progressing in their faith and give him the good news of their endurance in the faith.

That was Paul's plan, but I want to take note of the important phrases in verse 19 and then in verse 24, two phrases that give us insight into the mindset of Paul: **"I hope in the Lord Jesus"** and **"I trust in the Lord."** What do these phrases tell us? Well, they tell us that there is absolutely no presumption in the heart of Paul, rather a joyful submission to the will and purpose of God. Does he hope that all of these plans come to fruition? Sure. Does he hope and trust in Christ that he might be able to see the Philippians again? Absolutely, but Paul was a man under authority. He did not just presume upon God and expect that God should bless his plans. His life was under God's command.

Look, we have all seen that before, maybe we have experienced it. We have seen someone make plans that made sense to them, plans that God should, they think, bless – I've done it. And presuming upon God, they put those plans into action only to discover that it wasn't God's will after all. And what happens – disillusionment with God, sometimes anger and frustration, even bitterness. Paul learned the lesson well that: **"The heart of man plans his way, but the Lord establishes his steps."** (Proverbs 16:9, ESV)

Paul was mature in his faith. He understood the truth that man proposes; but God disposes. Man freely devises; but God powerfully directs. Man creatively plans; but God masterfully dictates. And we would do well to learn the same. Submit your life and will to the Lord, make wise plans – God's sovereignty is not an excuse for flying by the seat of your pants, seek the approval of wise counsel, and then trust and hope in the Lord, for Him to carry out His purpose for your own good, but don't ever presume upon Him.

Alec Motyer says: **"Paul's doctrine taught him that a sovereign God ruled all things: whether freedom or imprisonment, comfort or discomfort, sickness or health. The child of God lives under the sovereignty of God. Paul's practice was to accept without question or rebellion what the Lord ordained. The same Lord who called him to be an apostle could and would also ordain the sphere of apostleship, be it a free-roving commission to the Gentile world, or the restrictive limit of a Roman jail or the sentence of death."** So, these are simply Paul's plans, his desires, but he was fully submitted to the will and direction of God. But

from here, we move to Paul's commendation and testimony concerning Timothy and Epaphroditus – two excellent examples for the Philippians and for us to emulate as we work out our salvation. Check this out.

**Timothy – No One Like Him (20-22)** Paul commends and testifies regarding Timothy, starting in verse 20, saying: ***“For I have no one like him, who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare. For they all seek their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. But you know Timothy’s proven worth, how as a son with a father he has served with me in the gospel.”*** (Philippians 2:20–22, ESV) I don't know if you have ever been to a conference or something where they introduce a speaker. I have and to be quite honest I always have disliked the introductions that are given at a Bible conference, for instance. It always goes pretty much the same – a laundry list of achievements, educational accomplishments, where they have traveled, to whom they have spoken, the successes they have enjoyed, the size of their church, how fast the church has grown, etc. Those are the things that are held forth as the reason we should listen, as the reason that we should follow their example. Seldom, if ever, have I heard someone say, “Listen to this man because He loves Jesus Christ; he strives to live as Christ, and He loves the flock of God.” Seldom, if ever, have I heard anyone introduced and commended for his character.

But, when Paul commends Timothy, he doesn't speak of Timothy's achievements, where Timothy had spoken, his number of degrees, or the books he has written, his charisma or speaking skills. He speaks about what matters. He talks about His character. He puts him forth as an example because of who he is, not what he has done. And Paul knew Timothy.

Paul and Timothy had a special relationship. Timothy had become a follower of Christ, most likely during Paul's visit to Lystra during his first missionary journey. On a return trip through Lystra at the beginning of his second missionary journey, Paul chose Timothy to accompany him. Acts 16 says: ***“Paul came also to Derbe and to Lystra. A disciple was there, named Timothy, the son of a Jewish woman who was a believer, but his father was a Greek. He was well spoken of by the brothers at Lystra and Iconium. Paul wanted Timothy to accompany him, and he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in those places, for they all knew that his father was a Greek.”*** (Acts 16:1–3, ESV) Along with his spiritual maturity, Timothy's combined Greek and Jewish heritage made him uniquely qualified to minister the gospel with Paul to the Gentile world. To make Timothy more acceptable to the Jews, especially to those in Galatia who knew of him, Paul circumcised Timothy. And from

this point forward began one of the greatest partnerships for the sake of the gospel that has ever been.

It is clear that Paul deeply loved Timothy. With great affection, he refers to him as “my true child in the faith” (1 Tim 1:2), “my beloved child” (2 Tim 1:2), as “my beloved and faithful child in the Lord” (1 Cor 4:17). He had poured his life into him, shared ministry with him, had grown in confidence in him, so much so that he could say of Timothy: **“For I have no one like him.”** Paul says he has no-one like Timothy – literally no-one like-souled with him. The word there is “isopsychos.” It’s a rich word and what Paul is saying is this: “He is one with me in mind, one with me in thought, one with me in feeling, one with me in spirit. In other words, he thinks like I think. When it comes down to someone whose heart beats like mine, I have no one else.” He was sincerely interested in the spiritual and physical welfare of the Philippians. How refreshing that had to have been.

We are well familiar with the opposite aren’t we? I’ve known people and I’m sure you have too, who are only interested in you for what they can get out of you, how you can serve their agenda, how you can add to them. It is a person, truly to be prized, who takes a sincere interest in you for your good. We all like those kinds of people, but are we those kinds of people? Timothy was.

And like Paul, Timothy had laid aside all else for the gospel. Whatever plans or goals or personal desires he may have had, he laid them aside. Paul said of him: **For they all seek their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. But you know Timothy’s proven worth.** Timothy held peculiar worth in Paul’s eyes because he was always looking out for the interests of the Lord Jesus. He didn’t waver in his devotion to Christ. That is highly commendable. Alexander Maclaren wrote, **“Many a professing Christian life has a veneer of godliness nailed thinly over a solid bulk of selfishness.”** Unfortunately, he’s probably right. Kent Hughes says: **“We live in an age of unprecedented self, of weightless souls consumed with their own gravity.”** That’s a shocking statement, but again pretty accurate. Timothy put Christ first and in this he stood head and shoulders above those who were around him. It is so easy to put other things first, isn’t it? There’s a pattern that regrettably takes place too often in churches where some who were filled with zeal and excitement for Christ, who were white hot for the gospel, who delighted in studying Scripture, who loved to be with the people of God at every opportunity, who were fired up to serve Christ, begin to cool in their affections. They get pulled away – men by their work or leisure pursuits, women by

work or their families. Reputation, pleasure, personal plans, family, success – any number of things can replace a primary interest in Christ and His interests, and the interests of the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ slide down the list. They are still church members perhaps but hardly zealous for Christ. All of them would say, if asked, that they have legitimate reasons for their growing indifference. It's only a season. They are not as bad as others are in their absence and growing detachment from Christ and His people. But, truth be told, they are exactly where the others are – backsliding.

Maybe you have been there. Maybe you are there right now. What do you do? If in examining your heart you see that the pressure of this world and the passage of time has dimmed and cooled your passion for Christ and for the interests of His gospel, then go to God and confess it, and repent of it with a broken and contrite heart, and cry to God for strength and renewal of your former love and with new devotion and zeal determine to put things right and make the main thing the main thing – Christ. Timothy kept the main thing the main thing. Timothy put Christ first, together with Christ's interests, and the other things fell into place naturally. Just as Jesus said: **“But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.” (Matthew 6:33, ESV)** He was devoted not to self but to Christ, to the gospel, and to seeing the life of Christ come to fruition in God's people.

Paul says that Timothy's worth – his faithfulness – was demonstrated, proven, evident. The Greek word means to be tested and tried and found reliable. Previous ministry on a number of occasions had provided evidence of Timothy's spiritual character and maturity. Temptations to quit, to look for an easier way, to compromise, to choose the easy wrong over the hard right – Timothy had faced these things and though at times he may have stumbled, he persevered. He was reliable. His word was his bond. His actions were consistent. Proving takes time. It doesn't happen overnight. Timothy's character was tested and forged through ministry with Paul, **as a son with a father**, Paul says, **he has served with me in the gospel**. Some people want to lead without ever learning how to be led. Real character is tested and proven over time, through trial and hardship. Timothy, to use DA Carson's words, was no “untested upstart or self-preening peacock.”

By the time of this writing, Timothy had been with Paul for a little over 10 years.

Timothy had learned from Paul by observing, by listening to instruction, and by doing. He had been through some difficult times together, striving side by side for the gospel. He had set aside rivalry and conceit and counted others more significant than himself, while looking out for the spiritual interests of others and the interests of Christ. He devoted his life to Christ's church as the place in which to work out his salvation in fear and trembling. He shined as a light in the dark. He was Paul's dearest friend. And why? It was his character. Then he turns to Epaphroditus.

**Epaphroditus – Brother, Worker, Soldier (25-30)** Paul holds forth their own brother, Epaphroditus, as an example to the Philippians saying: ***“I have thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier, and your messenger and minister to my need, for he has been longing for you all and has been distressed because you heard that he was ill. Indeed he was ill, near to death. But God had mercy on him, and not only on him but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow. I am the more eager to send him, therefore, that you may rejoice at seeing him again, and that I may be less anxious. So receive him in the Lord with all joy, and honor such men, for he nearly died for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete what was lacking in your service to me.”*** (Philippians 2:25–30, ESV) Now there is much that we can glean from these few verses, but I want to begin by pointing out this fact – Epaphroditus was not a preacher, not a minister in the sense of being called to teach and preach as his life's work. He is a church member and I say that because I have heard church folks who will point out that, “You know, Paul, he was an apostle and Timothy was a pastor, and so their example kind of doesn't apply to me.” Now that's foolish thinking because before Paul was the Apostle to the Gentiles, admittedly a singular calling, he was first a Christian and Christian character is not exclusive to apostles or preachers. But no such argument can be made for Epaphroditus. Epaphroditus was a faithful follower of Christ, a faithful, one of those ordinary followers of Christ living extraordinary lives in ordinary ways and shining as a light in the world, the kind of person by whom the church has endured through the ages.

Now what can we glean from this text. Well, the first thing that we need to notice is that reason that Paul was sending Epaphroditus back to Philippi. While he was en route to Rome to bring the relief that Philippi had sent to him and to serve Paul or shortly after he got there, Epaphroditus had become ill. By God's mercy, Epaphroditus had recovered – a great comfort to Paul and a great grace to Epaphroditus. But, somehow that news had gotten

back to the church in Philippi of his illness and it caused great concern for him. He was concerned to let the church know that he had indeed accomplished the mission upon which he had been sent and that he had been spared by God. But he also began to become homesick for the church. What does that tell us? Well, it tells us that Epaphroditus loved the local church to which he belonged. He loved the people, he loved the fellowship, and he loved the camaraderie. He loved his church. That doesn't mean that he was unwilling to serve the church universal by going to minister to Paul, he was. But he had a deep and abiding love, not for the church in general, but for his church, the church in Philippi in particular. That body was the center of his life, a source of joy, and the people with whom he invested his life and he loved and missed them. That is an admirable trait—to love your church, the people not the program. This is a man about whom Paul could have written: ***“We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brothers, as is right, because your faith is growing abundantly, and the love of every one of you for one another is increasing.”*** (2 Thessalonians 1:3, ESV) He was a man who loved his church and that is certainly worthy of emulation.

Even more I want you to see how Paul refers to Epaphroditus. He uses the words: ***“brother,” “fellow worker,”*** and ***“fellow soldier.”*** It speaks to us of how Paul regarded his relationship to Epaphroditus. He saw him as a colleague, as his equal. This is good stuff. First, he refers to him as a brother. That may not seem like a big deal, but it is. It is a term of both affection and shared life in the way that it is used in the Scriptures. That's lost on us a little bit in our society today where everybody is a “bro.” But when Paul said it, he meant it. ***“A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity.”*** (Proverbs 17:17, ESV) And that was Epaphroditus. What is it that brothers share – or should share? A common lineage, a common family, a common faith, a common morality, common goals, common joys and sorrows, successes and burdens. As brothers and sisters in Christ, we know that our chief end is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. That doesn't mean we won't sometimes disagree, but brothers are brothers – they stick together.

But Paul also regarded Epaphroditus as a fellow worker. How is that significant? Well, it is significant in the fact that Epaphroditus wasn't a preacher, or a teacher, or someone who was engaged in “up front” ministry. That says something, of course, about Paul – he wasn't full of himself as an Apostle. But even more it says something of the way in which Paul valued his ministry to him, the work he did in serving Paul. Think of the ways that he would have been a blessing to Paul. Paul would have needed food and clothing, the necessary



supplies to write to the various churches for whom he cared, someone to find couriers to take his letters to their destinations. Epaphroditus would have fulfilled those roles and more.

In other words, though his ministry wasn't public in the sense that everyone in the church knew about him, Paul saw his ministry as advancing the gospel, every bit as essential as the preaching and teaching that Paul did. His contributions may not have been as obvious but they contributed mightily to the Apostle being able to fulfill his primary calling of preaching and teaching.

And notice too, that Paul refers to Epaphroditus as a fellow soldier. He viewed him as a guy who was in the fight with him, the good fight of faith. Serving Christ isn't easy. It's a fight, a battle, real warfare. We face the attacks of the enemy and Paul saw Epaphroditus as right there in the thick of the fight, not running away, but standing firm, desiring to please Christ. ***“Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No soldier gets entangled in civilian pursuits, since his aim is to please the one who enlisted him.”*** (2 Timothy 2:3–4, ESV)

Furthermore, as he commends Epaphroditus to the Philippians, he reminds them of the high regard in which they held him – as their messenger and minister to Paul. They chose him out from the body to be the representative of the church's love and service to Paul. That was pretty significant. He was chosen from among the men in Philippi to bring Paul a love gift, monetary support – that mission does not require a preacher, but it does require a man of impeccable character, who will see to it that the funds get where they needed to do. He was chosen to do this because he was a trustworthy man. Not only did he bring a gift, he was a gift, sent to serve Paul's needs while he was imprisoned because he was a man with a servant's heart. Again, character qualities worth emulating and pursuing.

One other thing that Paul mentions is that ***he nearly died for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete what was lacking in your service to me.*** He was willing to lay down his life, even up to the point of death, to do the work of Christ. He risked his life and nearly lost it for the work of Christ. Do you see that? In this, Epaphroditus was like Paul, who said: ***“But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.”*** (Acts 20:24, ESV)

Not that the Philippians were lacking in their love or support of Paul, but he wants to point out that he was willing to come as a representative and risk his life for the work of Christ. We see from Epaphroditus that there is no such thing as a “risk-free” faith. Not that it is a risk to believe in Jesus Christ – the gospel is sure. It is no risk to rest all of our hopes for salvation upon Him. But when we become Christ’s by faith, we are His and no longer our own and we must count our own security in this world as subservient to the work of Christ. In that limited sense, we must all be risk-takers by definition.

And let me say something about that “work of Christ.” Paul views every Christian – Timothy and Epaphroditus specifically – who is fulfilling their calling and carrying out their humble service for Christ as participating in the work of Christ. He views it according to the principle that Christ established in Matthew 10, where He said: **““Whoever receives you receives me, and whoever receives me receives him who sent me. The one who receives a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet’s reward, and the one who receives a righteous person because he is a righteous person will receive a righteous person’s reward. And whoever gives one of these little ones even a cup of cold water because he is a disciple, truly, I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward.””** (Matthew 10:40–42, ESV)

To facilitate the proclamation of the gospel by assisting the one proclaiming it is to enter into their work, and their reward! To show hospitality to a prophet is to participate in his prophetic ministry; to minister to the apostle Paul, as Epaphroditus did, was to participate in his apostolic ministry. Epaphroditus was, therefore, a very integral part of the **“work of Christ.”**

Timothy and Epaphroditus present to us, pastors and elders and church members alike, some real and tangible examples to follow. Timothy ministered for Paul by going to places Paul was not able to go. By his preaching and teaching, Timothy multiplied the ministry of the apostle, and therefore the work of the gospel. Epaphroditus ministered to Paul personally. While Timothy served, so to speak, as Paul’s mouth, Epaphroditus served as Paul’s hands and feet, doing things for him that he could not do in his incarceration. In doing so, Epaphroditus facilitated the ministry of Paul. Timothy and Epaphroditus were very different men, with very different ministries, but they are both a vital and valuable part of the body of Christ. They are both actively involved in the **“work of Christ.”**

In fact, though we may not have expected it, Paul makes a point of saying of saying regarding Epaphroditus, not a “star” by any means: **So receive him in the Lord with all joy, and honor such men.** And why? Because of his character.

So, when we look at this section, we can see what Paul does. He takes a man, called to gospel ministry like himself, Timothy, and a man who was your everyday church member, Epaphroditus, and he puts them forward as excellent examples to the church on Philippi, men to emulate, men who in each of their own contexts were working out their salvation, growing in Christ, with fear and with trembling and shining as a light in darkness. They are excellent examples to us and intended to serve a template to which we can compare ourselves. They show us vibrant examples of real Christian character: selflessness and devotion to the interests of Christ, proven and tested character, a heart to serve and not be served, true love for the church, a brother’s heart, a worker’s determination, a soldier’s steadfastness, humble and faithful service, and a willingness to risk one’s life for the work of Christ. This is the stuff, not of merely the super-spiritual, but of real and consistently robust Christianity.

I can see areas in which I need to grow. Do you?

These are the things that make for real living. Do not settle for a mediocre existence, like so many Christians do today. Do not settle for merely getting by with as little as possible in terms of expressing your faith. Do not settle for that which is not life. In the day of Christ, you will be glad that you didn’t.

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