

12 | PHILIPPIANS 2:19-30

THE JOY OF MINISTRY

Three models of ministry

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Announcements

1. Welcome visitors!
2. This week is Photo Sunday. Get new photos taken for the church directory. Mary Klikas and David Beakey are our photographers.

Introduction

SLIDE: The title of our message is “The Joy of Ministry.” When we speak of ministry, we are talking about the hard work of discipleship.

SLIDE: WHAT IS DISCIPLESHIP?

The word disciple means “learner.” To make a disciple is teach and model Jesus so that they become like Jesus. Discipleship is the teaching and modeling in life to help people become more like Jesus.

SLIDE: DISCIPLESHIP IS IMPERATIVE

“Christianity without discipleship is always Christianity without Christ” –Dietrich Bonhoeffer

SLIDE: MAKE DISCIPLES NOW!

We can't wait until we've got everything perfect with our lives. Every Christian here needs to make disciples now. Listen to Francis Chan to describe the nitty gritty of discipleship.

With discipleship, your problems are not just your problems—ultimately, they belong to the church body that God has placed you in. You are called to encourage, challenge, and help the other Christians in your life, and they are called to do the same for you. If you wait until all of your own issues are gone before helping others, it will never happen. This is a trap that millions have fallen into, not realizing that our own sanctification happens as we minister to others.¹

At the end of Philippians 2 (vs 19-30) we have a beautiful description of three ordinary men doing world changing ministry. Again, ministry is the work of discipleship. We are all called to do it. We are called to make disciples of all nations. That's why we come to know three men who are men of great joy and who love making disciples. Let me introduce you of three **ordinary models** of **extraordinary joy** for ministry: Paul, Timothy, and Epaphroditus.

Scripture Reading

SLIDES (5): Let's stand and read Philippians 2:19-30,

¹ Francis Chan. *Multiply: Disciples Making Disciples* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2012), 55-56.

I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, so that I too may be cheered by news of you. ²⁰ For I have no one like him, who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare. ²¹ For they all seek their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. ²² But you know Timothy's proven worth, how as a son with a father he has served with me in the gospel. ²³ I hope therefore to send him just as soon as I see how it will go with me, ²⁴ and I trust in the Lord that shortly I myself will come also. ²⁵ 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, ²⁶ for he has been longing for you all and has been distressed because you heard that he was ill. ²⁷ 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. ²⁸ I am the more eager to send him, therefore, that you may rejoice at seeing him again, and that I may be less anxious. ²⁹ So receive him in the Lord with all joy, and honor such men, ³⁰ for he nearly died for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete what was lacking in your service to me (2:19-30).

This is God's Word.

In our study we see three models of joyful Christian ministry.

- 1) Paul: a model of **selflessness**
- 2) Timothy: a model of **service**
- 3) Epaphroditus: a model of **sacrifice**

1. PAUL: A MODEL OF SELFLESSNESS (2:19-21). **SLIDE**

I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon

The apostle Paul had a selfless spirit that drove his joy in ministry. When you lose focus on yourself, and you have a big vision of God and his plan moving forward, you are truly joyful. God is in the business of moving mountains. He's in the business of raising the spiritually dead. He loves doing the incredible and unfathomable in people's lives. It's easy to be selfless when your eyes are focused on a big God. We serve a great God, amen?

Tammie's Horse

Some of you know that I have a twin sister. I also have two twin brothers who are 12 years older than me. My twin sister loves horses. We always had friends in the Wilmington and Kankakee area that had a horse ranch. We loved riding horses.

When we were 9 years old, my sister and I moved to Louisiana. For our first horse ride in the bayou the spooked and took off wildly. My sister lost the reins and the horse ran wild for what seemed like forever but was likely 15 minutes. I remember we had to chase the horse with the car until a horse trainer was able to grab the horse and halt it. In those moments we were thinking very carefully and clearly about how to rescue my sister. That's selflessness. Paul the apostle modeled it for us.

There's a clarity to our vision when we completely forget ourselves and concentrate solely on the task before us. It's an energizing feeling to be so focused on someone else that there is no thought of our own welfare, predicament, or problems. Though it seems ironic, it's a blessed state, far more meaningful than when we are obsessed with our own trials and tribulations. Paul is the model of a selfless servant of Christ. **He's so concerned about others that is not overcome by his own difficulties and sorrows.** We see this in verse 19.

THE JOY OF SELFLESS MINISTRY (2:19)

Paul's under house arrest, and what is his joy? Keeping his best friend and ministry partner with him? No. What would make him rejoice is seeing the Philippian believers encouraged by Timothy. "I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, so that I too may be **cheered** by news of you" (2:19). This is what makes Paul joyful: a **selfless** spirit. Seeing others happy in Christ **cheers** Paul's soul. Paul is ready to pour himself out like a **drink offering** for the faith of the Philippians (2:17-18). Life in Christ is worth risking everything. It's worth being radical. No matter what happens you win. "For me to live **is Christ** and to die is gain" (1:21).

Willing to Be Damned for the Lost

The extreme to which Paul adhered to this selflessness is, in fact, shocking to modern sensibilities. The great apostle tells the Romans that he wishes he could cut himself off from salvation if in doing so he might save Israel (Rom 9:3). Again, let's not quickly pass over this. Paul was fully aware of the total horrors of hell—the physical pain, the emotional angst, the spiritual alienation—yet still he proclaims, "I wish I could be damned in hell for all eternity, if in my damnation the rest of the people of Israel could be saved."²

Here is Paul 800 miles away from Philippi, and the one he calls "**my son**" and says, "I have no one like him" (2:20a) and "you know Timothy's proven worth" (2:21a) and yet he says: "I'm **going to send him** to you, just as soon as I know my fate" (2:23). Paul's going to die within three years. He'll be released for a year or so and then back to a deeper darker prison (the infamous *Mamertine prison* in Rome). Here's the point: in Paul's hour of need he sends his most **valued partner Timothy to Philippi** to care for them. He's going to send the only one he trusts to the people he loves: the Philippians. Paul is selfless: focused on the needs of others.

Selflessness starts first at the cross of Jesus. It's at the heart of being a Christ follower. "For they all seek their own interests, **not those of Jesus Christ**" (2:21). If you want to see Christ's interests, you have to look at the Cross. He gives his life away. **Discipleship** is a selfless endeavor. It's going to mean giving your life away in teaching and modeling Christ for others. This selfless sacrifice should give you joy!

² Gary Thomas. "The Joy of Selflessness." Gary Thomas Ministries. April 28, 2016. Accessed March 01, 2019. <http://www.garythomas.com/free-resources/the-joy-of-selflessness/>.

Joy is the Mark of True Discipleship

There ought to be a joy about our ministry. We all have favorite flavors. Some of you like sweet. Some of you like savory. Some of you like spicy. Some of you like mild. If Christians have a flavor it would be **joy**! Do you have a joyful spirit in your ministry?

SLIDE: JOY IS THE MARK OF TRUE DISCIPLESHIP

The great Methodist missionary to India (called the Billy Graham of India), E. Stanley Jones, said, “When I met Christ, it was as though I had swallowed sunshine.”³ Isn’t that a great statement? He was speaking of the joy that he experienced in meeting Jesus Christ. And then there was C.S. Lewis, a person that we’ve all probably read, that great British scholar, who said, “Joy is the serious business of heaven.”⁴ While I believe that, joy is sometimes quite fleeting on earth.

Do you find ministry a hassle or a joy? What greater business is there in heaven or on earth? When one sinner repents, all heaven rejoices! Shouldn’t we be rejoicing?

THE HARD WORK OF SELFLESS MINISTRY (2:20)

Selfless ministry is hard work. Paul didn’t just bury his talent. He didn’t bury the treasure of the Gospel. He was constantly raising people up and turning them into leaders. We are all called to do the hard work of discipleship, investing in each other. Paul did that with Timothy. He says, “For I have **no one like him**, who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare, ²¹ For they **all seek their own interests**, not those of Jesus Christ. ²² But you know Timothy’s proven worth, how as **a son with a father** he has served with me in the gospel” (2:20-21). Timothy was uniquely in tune with the Philippians because he’d been around Paul so much. He had a “father-son” relationship with him.

Do you know how much time it takes to raise up disciples? We are called to duplicate ourselves. Paul did that with Timothy.

SLIDE: METAPHORS FOR DISCIPLESHIP IMPLY WORK

Consider how much work discipleship is. The Scriptures compare it in many ways:

1. A **father-son relationship**. With them from cradle to maturity. You know why Timothy was selfless when everyone else was “seeking their own interests”? Because Paul was selfless. Timothy has a huge heart of compassion because his father in the faith has a huge heart of compassion. Making disciples is far more than a program. It’s like a father-son relationship. It takes a lot of time. It is the mission of our lives. It defines us. A disciple is a disciple maker. How much work does a father or mother put into a child? You’ve got to clothe them and keep them clean and do everything for them at first. You are with them at all their important milestones.
2. **Fishers of men**. Mt 4:19. A fisherman has to fish at **all hours**. Sometimes you fish all night till people start responding to the Holy Spirit. We are not only fishers

³ E. Stanley Jones. *The Way* (Nashville: Stone & Pierce, 1946), 70.

⁴ C.S. Lewis. *Letters to Malcolm: Chiefly on Prayer* (San Diego: Harvest, 1964), 92-93.

of men in evangelism but in discipleship. We have to keep going after people. We could add to this a similar picture of the shepherd going after the sheep.

3. **Servant of all.** Mk 9:35. A servant has no rights. We give up our **rights**. We work **all hours**.
4. **Bearing a cross.** “If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple. Whoever does not bear his own cross and come after me cannot be my disciple” (Lk 14:26-27).
5. **Many more...**
 - We are the **salt** that is constantly preserving people’s lives with truth.
 - We are the **light** that is constantly shining into the darkness of confused souls helping them see and follow Jesus.
 - As disciples we are like a **body** that works together.
 - Like a **bride** that is always faithful to her groom.
 - Like a **temple** that perpetually is inhabited by the living God.

All of these metaphors imply the constancy of the work of discipleship. We don’t just do discipleship on the Lord’s Day. Discipleship is not a program. It’s a life. We live life together.

THE REWARD OF SELFLESS MINISTRY (2:25)

Look down at verse 25 and consider the **reward** for selfless ministry. Paul has invested in the pastor of the Philippians, Epaphroditus, and now they are investing in him by sending him to minister to Paul. Paul taught the Philippians well. He **poured** out his life out for the Philippians, like a **“drink offering”** (1:17). In return, they were pouring their lives out for him by sending him their pastor. He says,

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 (2:25).

Paul as a selfless disciple produces a selfless church in Philippi.

Epaphroditus is Pastor at Philippi

Later on, John Chrysostom (349-407) lists all the pastors of Philippi, and he names **Epaphroditus** as the pastor there at the time of the letter.⁵ Epaphroditus is here called **“your messenger”** which could refer to him not only as Paul’s emissary but the Philippians’ pastor.

He obviously has a very special relationship with the church as a whole since Epaphroditus is heartbroken that his church is worrying about him because he was near death in bringing a love offering and correspondence from the Philippian church to Paul.

⁵ Le Quien, *Oriens Christianus*, II (Paris: Ex Typographia Regia, 1740), 67.

Paul says: “I am well supplied, having received from **Epaphroditus** the gifts you sent” (4:18).

What a reward Paul had from this little church, that they would send their pastor to him. Philippi was no mega-church. The church at Philippi, though well-known and influential, would eventually grow to a modest size of at most 75 people amidst a town of 10,000.⁶ Though modest in size they did big things for God and for the Kingdom. They would grow somewhat rapidly. In the next century they would grow to be close to 1,000 people.

SLIDE: EVERY MEMBER INVOLVED

The reward of discipleship is making disciples. The model is presented to us by Paul in Ephesians 4.

And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers,¹² to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ,¹³ until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ (Eph 4:11-13).

Without Selflessness, No Discipleship

Why was this tiny church having a global impact all the way to Rome? They weren't a mega-church. They understood the joy of ministry. It takes every member involvement. Every member needs discipleship.

SLIDE (2): PRACTICAL WAYS TO BE A DISCIPLE MAKER

1. **Establish a D-Group.** Be in contact with at least one or two other person every day (Heb 10:24-25). Everyone should have a little Discipleship Group. We'll call it D-group for short. Who's in your D-group?

And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works,²⁵ not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near (Heb 10:24-25).

Surely these verses are not only referring to meeting together on the Lord's Day, but also more and more privately. With text messages, cell phones and video chats, we should be in continual contact discipling one another throughout the day. Pick at least one or two people for your D-Group. Usually, these start organically.

2. **Pray.** Pray for specific needs for your D-group throughout the day.
3. **Abide and shine.** Make sure you are meeting with God, abiding with him. The goal of discipleship is to know God better and help others know him better (Phil 3:10). Being a disciple of Jesus means that we are being transformed into his image. God wants to change us so much that it intrigues others

⁶ Eduard Verhoef. “The Church of Philippi in the First Six Centuries of Our Era” (Maartensdijk, the Netherlands: University of Pretoria, 2005), *HTS Theological Studies* 61, no. 1 & 2: 565-92.

4. **Smile!** Be approachable. Be cheerful when you answer the phone, etc.
5. **Do life together.** Do lunch. Men, do basketball, or something. Ladies, do whatever women do. Invite each other to your home.
6. **Worship,** fellowship, pray at your church together.
7. **Reach Out.** Invite people to church. Give out Gospel tracts. Give your testimony.
8. **Pick up your phone.** Call fellow believers. Pick up when they call.
9. **Follow through.** Don't just start this. Finish it. Persevere together.

2. TIMOTHY: A MODEL OF SERVICE (2:19-24). **SLIDE**

I have no one like him

Timothy is mentioned **twenty-four** times in Paul's letters and is identified with Paul in the writing of five letters.⁷ Timothy was one of the better known of Paul's companions.

His **mother** (Lois) and **grandmother** (Eunice) are both model Jewish women, and are named in 2 Timothy 1:5.

His **father** was Greek (Acts 16:1) but since he likely died when Timothy was quite young, the boy was raised by his godly mother and grandmother, who gave him a good working knowledge of the Old Testament Scriptures (2 Tim 3:15).⁸

Timothy was Paul's son in the faith and seems to have been converted at the time of Paul's first missionary visit to **Lystra** and Iconium.

Paul may have **recovered** from his stoning at Lystra in the house of Timothy's mother.

When Paul chose Timothy to be one of his companions on his second missionary journey, the apostle had Timothy **circumcised** to make him more acceptable to the Jews (Acts 16:1-4). Remember, Timothy is **half-Jewish**. He wanted to reach his own people. Paul always approached the synagogue congregation first when he entered a new town.⁹

Timothy is willing to do anything for Christ. He's willing to be **sent**. He's a minister to Paul in Rome where the apostle is under house arrest. Yet he's **genuinely concerned** for the **welfare** of the Philippian church. Paul writes about his son in the faith here in Philippians 2:19-24.

I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, so that I too may be cheered by news of you. ²⁰ For I have no one like him, who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare. ²¹ For they all seek their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. ²² But you know Timothy's proven worth, how as a son with a father he has served with me in the gospel.²³ I hope therefore to send him just as soon as I see how it will go with me, ²⁴ and I trust in the Lord that shortly I myself will come also (2:19-24).

⁷ David Jeremiah, *Count It All Joy: Discover a Happiness That Circumstances Cannot Change* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2016), 131-132.

⁸ John Phillips, *Exploring Ephesians & Philippians: An Expository Commentary*, The John Phillips Commentary Series (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2009), Php 2:19.

⁹ Ibid.

BIG VISION SERVICE (2:19)

Timothy had a big vision view of ministry. We read Paul's words and think nothing of the journey Timothy has to embark: "I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon" (2:19). Ok, this is an 800-mile journey on foot. He couldn't look up Air BnB to find a place to stay. There were no Ubers or Internet. He had to figure this out. But Timothy was willing to travel and to pay a price for his service to Christ because he had a big vision of a big God. Timothy likely got to know Paul as Paul was nursed back to health after being stoned to death in Lystra. It was probably in Timothy's home, where his mother Lois and grandmother Eunice took care of the apostle. Timothy heard the stories for the Gospel going forward.

Timothy put himself last. It was a great joy for Timothy to serve the Lord. He was glad to be submissive in his service to the apostle Paul. Timothy was willing to be **sent** all around the Roman Empire on behalf of Paul. He was submissive to Paul, "as a son with a father" serving with the great apostle (2:22). Timothy served the Lord where ever Paul directed. And it really was the Lord directing them. It was often scary to go to the difficult situations. Paul was constantly encouraging Timothy. ("God's not given you a spirit of fear...").

Discipleship and growth are not at all possible without a big vision. To be a disciple is to be a learner. You need to see how others serve. Timothy was willing to submit and learn how to serve from the tutelage of Paul. **Who are your teachers at Living Hope?** Normally, it's pretty hard to program something like this. It has to happen naturally. But once you've found someone to help disciple you, you can get some accountability.

SLIDE (2): EXCUSES FOR A SMALL VISION

Excuses for Small Vision

1. **No one has pursued me for discipleship.** Who pursued Paul? He met with the Lord for three years before anything happened. That should not be the norm. But then he met Barnabas and received direction from Aquilla and Pricilla.
2. **Greener grass syndrome.** "I'll find a better discipleship situation elsewhere." That mentality always hurts yourself and Christ's church. If you want greener grass, water your own grass. Find ways to do discipleship. Persevere. Don't ever ever give up.
3. **I can't disciple someone because I still have faith struggles.** This one's a classic. We think we must operate at some higher level of spirituality to make disciples. Listen, we are not perfect saints; we are forgiven sinners. What matters is **who** we follow together—he's got enough perfection for all of us. Don't let this excuse keep you from obedience.
4. **I don't know enough.** While teaching and learning are central to discipleship, we don't need to know everything. Invite people into places where you are learning and praying and serving. And as you do that, your own learning will accelerate quickly.

5. **I don't know what to do.** Discipleship is not complicated; it's not about a technique or methodology. Wondering what to do? Here's my thing: *just start*. Invite a friend to discuss spiritual things. Take someone to church with you. Pray for a friend. Learn along the way. It's not nearly as complicated as you think. It's simply helping someone take the next step after Jesus.
6. **That's the pastor's job.** I love this one. As a pastor, I want to laugh out loud, mostly because it's so absurd. All disciples must make disciples. Pastors help us become better disciple-makers, so we can all do our one job.
7. **I don't want to be presumptuous.** Actually, it's not called presumption to help someone follow Jesus—it's called loving **obedience**. Remember: any trace of presumption or hierarchy is evidence that you've forgotten what's going on: we are not making people **our** disciples but disciples of Jesus.
8. **I'm not an academic.** You don't need to be. In some circles discipleship has, unfortunately, become a kind of rigorous academic program—read these 40 books, pray 2 hours a day, etc. Discipleship is not primarily academic, though it includes loving God with our whole mind, as well as heart, soul and strength. In the end, we are not becoming religious egg-heads who know stuff but passionate followers of Jesus who serve him in the world. Be who you are.
9. **I tried that once and it didn't go well.** Yep. Sometimes things don't go well. That's just true. And we learn through it. But stopping because it didn't work out well? I don't think Jesus left us that option.
10. **I don't have time.** Then your priorities are wrong. At any job, how long would we last if we kept ignoring the one thing we had been tasked to do, claiming we don't have the time for it?
11. **I don't feel I have much to give.** This one really shuts people down, and often includes a combination of excuses. Here's the fact: none of us have that much to give, but by the Holy Spirit can give through us. Keep your relationship with Jesus in focus, and simply share where you are growing. Let Jesus be the giver.
12. **I don't want to.** This final one isn't an excuse—it's flat out disobedience. If we are honest, there are times when we hear Jesus' commission to us and we reject it. We don't want to. What do we do with that? We need to repent, reconnect with Jesus' heart for people, and get on with the task at hand. **Because in the end, we only have one job. Are we getting it done?**

BIG HEARTED SERVICE (2:20-21)

Timothy cared about the church! There was **no one like him**, who is **genuinely concerned for** the Philippians' **welfare** (2:20). Timothy was not the pastor at Philippi, but he loved that small church with a big heart.

When we serve the Lord, **it takes thick skin and a big heart**. Timothy wouldn't stop loving the saints at Philippi.

SLIDE: DIETRICH BONHOEFFER QUOTE

Dietrich Bonhoeffer famously said,

“When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die.”

Timothy was willing and able to die without becoming bitter or jaded by ministry. How is that possible. How do you remain “genuinely concerned” for the church when you are constantly suffering?

Timothy’s Imprisonment

Timothy is willing to care for the Philippians welfare no matter what the risk. The author of Hebrews records that he had been **imprisoned** and will be released. Who knows what all he’s gone through for the saints?

“You should know that our brother Timothy has been released, with whom I shall see you if he comes soon” (Heb 13:23).

SLIDE: HOW TO MAINTAIN A BIG HEART (AND AVOID BURNOUT)

1. **Keep your eyes on Jesus!** Sinners sin. People will always fail themselves, the Lord, and you. Jesus will never fail you.
2. **Stay humble.** Most of the time when we are angry or dejected it is because of self worship / idolatry. Humility and the fear of the Lord are necessary to keep perspective when people fail you.
3. **Rejoice in God’s love.** Remember at the end of the day you are loved. He’s not willing that any should perish, and that means he’s not willing you should perish.
4. **Remember you are not the Savior.** You can’t do it all. Delegate. Say no to things. Get proper rest. You are only human.
5. **Take risks and see God break through.** We have a big God who does big things in people’s lives if you ask him. You need to take some risks. Have people over. Hand out a Gospel tract. Introduce yourself to someone new at church. Sit in a different section of the church. Pray specifically and see God answer prayer.

BIG DIVIDEND SERVICE (2:22-24)

If you will invest in others, God will give you dividends! Paul invested in Timothy and it really paid off.

But you know Timothy's **proven worth**, how as a son with a father he has served with me in the gospel.²³ I hope therefore to send him just as soon as I see how it will go with me, ²⁴ and I trust in the Lord that shortly I myself will come also.

Timothy cared about discipleship. He learned from Paul to do whatever it takes to disciple others. Paul says I have **no one like him**. “You know Timothy's **proven worth**, how as a son with a father he has served with me in the gospel” (2:23). Timothy is joyfully

serving Paul and the church, and most of all the Lord, and his service is valuable. He has a proven worth.

Timothy has become a disciple of proven worth. If you will invest in others, God will give you dividends!

Without Service, No Kingdom Expansion

We have to be willing to put ourselves out there in service. And without real big vision, big hearted service, there will not be big dividends.

What is your proven worth to God's kingdom? When you are spoken about by other members of this church or any church you are in, do they say: I know this man or this lady's proven worth! They are profitable.

3. EPAPHRODITUS: A MODEL OF SACRIFICE (2:25-30). **SLIDE**

Epaphroditus my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier, and your messenger

Epaphroditus had been sent to Rome to minister to Paul, but shortly after arriving the the Philippian pastor becomes **terribly ill**. Ultimately, he recovered, but not before a long struggle where he lingered at death's door. News of his illness might have traveled back to Philippi, and the man was concerned that his friends back home would be worried about him. Furthermore, when he returned earlier than expected, some might think he returned as a quitter, so Paul was careful to write strong words in his defense.

THE EXAMPLE OF SACRIFICE (2:25-27)

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,²⁶ for he has been longing for you all and has been distressed because you heard that he was ill.²⁷ 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 love how Paul describes Epaphroditus: "my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier, and your messenger..." (2:25). The church of Philippi was the first church that Paul founded in Macedonia and likely in Europe (cf Phil 4:15; 1 Thess 2:2; Acts 16:11-12). This was a very new church, and they wanted to send their pastor to Paul. One the way he almost died: **he was ill, near to death** (2:27, 30).

In those days when people visited prisoners who were held captive under Roman authority, they were often prejudged as criminal types as well. Therefore, a visitor exposed himself to danger just by being near those who were considered dangerous. Paul says:

...he [Epaphroditus] nearly died for the work of Christ, **risking** his life to complete what was lacking in your service to me (2:30).

The Greek term Paul uses here for “risking”—*paraboleuomai*—is one that meant “to hazard with one’s life . . . to gamble.” Epaphroditus did just that.

Riskiers for Christ: Parabolani!

In the early church there were societies of men and women who called themselves the *parabolani for Christ*, that is, the “**riskiers for Christ**.” They ministered to the **sick** and **imprisoned**, and they saw to it that, if at all possible, martyrs and sometimes even enemies would receive an **honorable burial**. For example, in the city of Carthage during the great plague of A.D. 252, **Cyprian, the pastor of Carthage**, showed remarkable courage. In self-sacrificing love for his flock and the world, he took upon himself the care of those sick with the plague and encouraged his congregation nurse them and bury the dead. What a contrast with the **practice of the heathen** who were throwing the corpses out of the plague-stricken city and were running away in terror!¹⁰

As Christians, we are the **Parabolani for Christ**. We are the **Riskiers for Jesus!** We’ve got to be there sacrificing our lives like Epaphroditus. Yes, it’s inconvenient and even dangerous, but that’s the true display of love for one another.

By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another (Jn 13:35).

Epaphroditus wasn’t extraordinary among Christians. We shouldn’t look at him as a rare case. This is the commitment we are all called to. He was a pastor who became a messenger for Paul. Before email, cell phones and text messaging, people had to deliver messages by hand.

You don’t have to be a hero to be part of the **Parabolani for Christ!**

Moms, you are a risker for Christ every time you share the Gospel with your little ones. You are a risker when you carefully nurture them in the Scriptures. You are standing against the cosmic powers of darkness. You are a hero!

Dads, you are a risker for Christ as you stand against this emasculated age and lead your wife and children.

Singles, you are a risker for Christ as you remain pure in this lascivious age of filth. As you make wise media choices.

All of us are riskers for Christ when we pick up the phone and call each other outside of Sundays and shepherd each other.

The Heroic Little Brother

This reminds me of the six-year-old girl who became deathly ill with a dread disease. To survive, she needed a blood transfusion from someone who had previously conquered the same illness. The situation was complicated by her rare blood type. Her nine-year-old brother qualified as a donor, but everyone was hesitant to ask him since he was just a lad. Finally they agreed to have the doctor pose the question. The attending physician tactfully

¹⁰ William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Book House, 1962), 144–45.

asked the boy if he was willing to be brave and donate blood for his sister. Though he didn't understand much about such things, the boy agreed without hesitation: "Sure, I'll give my blood for my sister." He lay down beside his sister and smiled at her as they pricked his arm with the needle. Then he closed his eyes and lay silently on the bed as the pint of blood was taken. Soon thereafter the physician came in to thank the little fellow. The boy, with quivering lips and tears running down his cheeks, asked, "Doctor, when do I die?" At that moment the doctor realized that the naive little boy thought that by giving his blood, he was giving up his life. Quickly he reassured the lad that he was not going to die, but amazed at his courage, the doctor asked, "Why were you willing to risk your life for her?" "Because she is my sister . . . and I love her," was the boy's simple but significant reply.

So it was between **Epaphroditus** and his brother **Paul** in Rome . . . and so it is to this day. Danger and risk don't threaten true friendship; they strengthen it. Such friends are modern-day members of the *parabolani*, that reckless band of friends—riskers and gamblers, all—who love their brothers and sisters to the uttermost. Each one deserves our respect. When we need them, they are there. I have a few in that category. Hopefully, you do too.¹¹

THE HONOR OF SACRIFICE (2:28-30)

²⁸I am the more eager to send him, therefore, that you may rejoice at seeing him again, and that I may be less anxious. ²⁹So **receive him in the Lord with all joy, and honor such men**, ³⁰for he nearly died for the work of Christ, **risking** his life to complete what was lacking in your service to me (2:28-30).

Paul says we should **honor** men like Epaphroditus, not because he is a pastor but because of their sacrifice. In this world, those who are honored are those who seem to take, take, take. The richest and the most glamorous are always honored in a pagan culture. But not in the church. Paul said, Epaphroditus was a man to be honored because of his sacrifice.

We believe Christians should live by a code of **honor**. Hopefully you honor those in authority over you whether you agree with them or not. We need to have a code like **Daniel** who served pagan kings. We should have a spirit of honor and gratitude that marks our lives. We say thank you to any elected officials. We say thank you to those who protect us day in and day out: police, fire fighters, our military.

Paul's argument is that this **honor** should extend to the church of Jesus Christ as well. We should show **honor** one to another. **Epaphroditus** was willing to give his life. Paul says let's **honor** him. Paul was willing to give his life. Let's **honor** him. Let's all give our lives for each other. Let's **honor** each other. This is sacred ground. Let's work out our salvation with fear and trembling because **Christ** gave his life for us. Above all, let's **honor** Christ!

¹¹ Charles R. Swindoll. *Laugh Again Hope Again: Two Books to Inspire a Joy-Filled Life* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson),

How about you? Do you honor those who are investing in your lives? Do you honor each other?

Conclusion

Here are three great men of joy in ministry. How they loved serving the Lord. We are also called to serve the Lord with gladness. Let's close with a powerful and important Psalm.

SLIDE: PSALM 100

Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth! ² Serve the Lord with gladness! Come into his presence with singing! ³ Know that the Lord, he is God! It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture. ⁴ Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise! Give thanks to him; bless his name! ⁵ For the Lord is good; his steadfast love endures forever, and his faithfulness to all generations (Psalm 100).

By God's grace saints, let us serve the Lord with gladness!