

Philippians 2:19-30
Living Examples of Humble Servanthood
Sunday, February 16th, 2025
By Ryan Perry

Scripture

Philippians 2:19–30

[19] 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.

Let's Pray

Introduction

When I was 11 years old, I remember that one of my favorite commercials was a Gatorade commercial that featured Michael Jordan. He was still in his prime with the Chicago Bulls and this commercial would catch you with this famous jingle "Like Mike, I wanna be like Mike." **Does anybody remember that commercial?**

The reason I loved this commercial so much was because he was my favorite basketball player and yes, I wanted to be like Mike. I wanted jump like him, do slam dunks like him, shoot like him, and be a star like him.

So my friends and I would play basketball every day, we tried to buy the right shoes to wear, we would watch his games, and we even drank Gatorade because we somehow thought it might help us be like Jordan.

We tried to follow his example because we thought if we did, we could be like him. The only problem is that I am a short skinny white dude without any ups. So being Jordan wasn't in the cards for me.

But even though I would never grow up to be Jordan, as I look back on that experience, God has used it and others like it to teach me a very important lesson about how we learn and grow as humans.

We learn and grow by emulating what we see in other people. This is true in sports, it's true for our kids, and it's true in our Christian lives.

This is why Paul, in our passage this morning, gives us and the Philippians two more living examples of humble servanthood from the lives of Timothy and Epaphroditus.

Because he understands that their examples are important and instructive. And that we should see within them a living picture of Christ that is both meant to be praised and lived out within our fellowship.

So this morning, I am going to use the first two parts of this message to unpack the examples of Timothy and Epaphroditus, and then the final part will be focused on what we should learn and apply from their lives.

Let's begin then by first looking at the example of Timothy.

Timothy: The selfless servant.

Philippians 2:19-23

[19] 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.

Background on Timothy

When we read through the New Testament, we run across the name Timothy a lot in Acts and the epistles of Paul. In fact, we get two full letters, written by Paul, that are specifically devoted to instructing him on how to live out his ministry from the Lord.

But who exactly is Timothy and how did he even become associated with Paul?

To answer that question, let's look together at Acts 16:1-3. Here's what Luke writes:

[1] 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. [2] He was well spoken of by the brothers at Lystra and Iconium. [3] 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.

The first thing to notice is that Paul was in Lystra when he encountered Timothy, which means that he is from Lystra, which is in modern-day Turkey. Secondly, Timothy was half Jewish (from his mother) and half Greek (from his father).

Third, he was a disciple of Christ, who had a good reputation. Fourth, Paul wanted Timothy to accompany him on his second missionary journey.

As a side note, we don't know exactly when Timothy came to faith, but it is reasonable to believe that it happened when Paul first preached in Lystra in Acts 14:8-23.

But what we do know is that from Acts 16 on, Timothy becomes a companion and fellow worker with Paul.

Other things we know from the New Testament is that Timothy was commissioned, by God, through Paul, to do the work of an evangelist (1 Tim. 4:14; 2 Tim. 4:5). And that he eventually became the pastor of the church in Ephesus. (1 Tim. 1:3)

However, when Paul wrote this letter to the Philippians, Timothy was actually serving with him in Rome and helped him to co-write that letter. (Phil. 1:1)

A letter that lays out Paul's deep love and concern for the Philippians because Epaphroditus, when he brought Paul their financial gift, also brought a troubling report about their behavior.

And yet, despite Paul's great concern for them, he can't physically be present with them because he's awaiting trial in prison.

Realizing this, his solution is to send Timothy in his place. And he did this so that they could begin to make progress and have joy in their faith, according to Philippians 1:25-26, and Timothy can bring back good news about how they are standing firm in the gospel (Phil. 1:27).

But why send Timothy and not someone else?

The answer is found in a series of commendations that Paul gives to Timothy that not only give his reasons for sending Timothy, but also put him forward as a living example of Christ's humble servanthood that should be emulated.

So let's just take a few minutes to walk through what Paul says about Timothy in Philippians 2:19-23. The first commendation that Paul gives to Timothy is this:

He has the mind and heart of Christ.

Philippians 2:20a

[20a] For I have no one like him (Isopsychos: of equal soul)...

As you can see the Greek word for "like him" is ee-SOHP-soo-kohs which literally means, "of equal or same soul."

Paul is trying to convey the idea that he and Timothy have the same mind and the same heart. They are kindred spirits who are filled with the love of Christ. A love that Paul mentions in Philippians 1:8 when he says:

[8] For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection (love) of Christ Jesus.

Just as Paul was filled with the love of Christ, so was Timothy. Therefore, he is sending him as an example of Christ's love for them as he encourages the Philippians in their faith.

He is others focused.

Philippians 2:20-21

[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.

Right here, Paul is making a clear connection all the way back to Philippians 2:3-4 where he says:

[3] Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. [4] Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.

In making this connection, Paul is once again exposing the selfish ambition and vain glory that are present, both in Rome and in the Philippian church, and is contrasting it with the humble servanthood that is present within Timothy.

For when he says that Timothy is "***genuinely concerned for your welfare,***" that phrase genuinely concerned means that he "***deeply and passionately cares about the well-being and the growth of the Philippians.***"

He is focused on their good and their growth in Christ. **He is truly others focused.**

Therefore, Paul is sending Timothy because he will genuinely serve them, and will be for them a living example of Christ's servanthood that they should emulate.

He has a faithful gospel witness.

Philippians 2:22

[22] But you know Timothy's **proven worth (dokime)**, how as a son with a father he has served with me in the gospel.

In this last commendation of Timothy, Paul uses the phrase “proven worth” to describe Timothy. And that phrase is actually the Greek word “dokime” which means something like **“going through a process of testing and being approved.”**

In traveling with Paul, Timothy's faith has been tested through trials and tribulations, he has been faithful in all of his work with Paul, and he has remained faithful to the gospel of Jesus Christ. **He has a faithful, genuine, and proven gospel witness.**

Therefore, Paul is sending Timothy because he knows that he will be a model of unwavering faithfulness to Christ in Paul's absence.

Now, you might be thinking that Timothy seems like some super servant of Jesus who is head and shoulders above normal Christians. But there is something important to remember about Timothy. He was an ordinary man with ordinary sin struggles. Look with me at 2 Timothy 1:6-7:

[6] For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands, [7] for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control.

Timothy struggled with fear, and at times his fear kept him from fulfilling his gifting and calling as an evangelist. So Paul has to remind Timothy to not be afraid, but to use his gifts because the Spirit of the living God is within him.

So when Paul commends Timothy to the Philippians, he is really talking about an ordinary person, just like you and me.

Yet, what we see in Timothy is someone who, like Paul, has been captivated and motivated by the love of Christ.

He fully understands what Christ has done for him so that his fundamental desires have changed. He is no longer motivated by his own comfort, ambition, or glory. Rather, he is motivated, by Christ, to lay aside his own desires, so that others would come to know and be built up in Christ.

Therefore, Paul is commending Timothy both to the Philippians and to us, not because he was a great man, rather, he serves as an example of what it should look like to be captivated by the love of Christ.

To be selfless servants of Christ who focus not on our own interests but instead work for the good of others as we build one another up in our love for Jesus.

So that's our first living example this morning. **Timothy the selfless servant.**

Now, let's turn our attention to Epaphroditus. Look with me at Philippians 2:25-30.

Epaphroditus: The suffering servant.

Philippians 2:25-30

[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.

Although Paul plans to send Timothy as soon as his appeal to the emperor has been settled, he is anxious for the Philippians and decides to send Epaphroditus right away.

Now, we admittedly don't know a whole lot about Epaphroditus. In fact, he is not mentioned outside of the book of Philippians.

However, what we do know is that he was sent by the Philippian church to bring a monetary gift to Paul while he was in prison. As it says in Philippians 4:18:

[18] I have received full payment, and more. I am well supplied, having received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God.

In this way, he served as an emissary or envoy on behalf of the Philippian church, because he was carrying out the church's ministry to Paul by bringing him this monetary gift.

But something happened along the way. Epaphroditus got really ill and nearly died as he attempted to get this gift to Paul.

Realizing then that the church of Philippi had heard about his illness and was worried about Epaphroditus, he decides that he is going to send him back to Philippi.

But before he does this, he also gives Epaphroditus a series of commendations that show us that he isn't just sending him back to Philippi so that they know he is safe. Rather, he is

sending him back to be a living example of what it looks like to be a suffering servant for Christ.

So, like we did with Timothy, let's take a few minutes to walk through these commendations in Philippians 2:25-30. The first thing that Paul tells us about Epaphroditus is that :

He is focused on serving Christ.

Philippians 2:25

[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...

Paul uses 4 important words or phrases here to describe Epaphroditus.

- **My brother**, which not only denotes his place within the family of God, but the closeness that he shared with Paul in his ministry.
- **Fellow worker**, which means that Epaphroditus was a part of Paul's associates or team who were working to advance the gospel.
- **Fellow soldier**. Now the use of this term would inevitably resonate with the Philippians because Philippi was a colony of war veterans. Also, it would remind them of Paul's words in Phil. 1:27 when he told them **"to strive side by side (which means to wrestle for fight) for the sake of the gospel."** Epaphroditus was someone who, like a good soldier, was contending and fighting for the gospel even in the face of opposition.
- **Your messenger and minister to my need**. Epaphroditus faithfully fulfilled his ministry on behalf of the Philippians and met Paul's needs while he was with him.

And when we put these all together, we get the picture of a man who was singularly focused on serving the cause of the gospel in any way that he could. **He was singularly focused on serving Christ.**

A mind-set which Paul is continually trying to foster in the minds and hearts of the Philippians as he calls them to live as heavenly citizens.

He has a deep concern for others.

Philippians 2:26-27a

[26] for he has been longing for you all and has been distressed because you heard that he was ill. [27a] Indeed he was ill, near to death.

Now, I don't know what happens to you when you get sick, but I have to admit that my general mental state is usually focused on me and my health.

In fact, even when I get healthy, my first thought isn't usually about how others may be feeling. Instead, I am focused on getting my life and my to-do lists together so I can feel ready for the days ahead.

Epaphroditus, on the other hand, isn't focused on the fact he almost died, or on getting his life together now that he is recovered. Rather he is more concerned and distressed by the fact that his brothers and sisters in Philippi are anxious because they knew he was seriously ill.

His main concern was for the Philippians and their well-being and not himself. Therefore, Like Timothy, Paul is holding up Epaphroditus as an example of the love and concern of Christ that the church should have for one another.

He is willing to suffer for Christ.

Philippians 2:30

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

If we go back to Philippians 1, one of the things that was causing major issues in this church was the fact that they were being persecuted and were suffering for their faith.

So Paul not only talks about how his suffering was advancing the gospel, but he tells them that suffering for Christ is a part of God's plan. As he says in Philippians 1:29:

[29] For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake,

But as good and helpful as Paul's example and words may have been, I can only imagine how the example of Epaphroditus hit home for them.

One of their own members, willingly and faithfully risked his life, endured sickness, and was at the brink of death so that the Philippians could serve and support Paul in his gospel ministry.

Can you imagine what that kind of example would have done for their faith?

For the grumblers, the arguers, the selfish, the frightened, and the down-hearted, Epaphroditus, would have been a shining example of a man who had so centered his life on Christ that his physical life didn't matter.

Rather what was most important to him was that he honor Christ above all, whether by life or by death. **Therefore, Paul is sending him back to the Philippians to encourage them to remain faithful to Christ and to be for them a living example of a suffering servant.**

So there you have it. Two ordinary and living examples of humble servanthood.

Timothy the selfless servant and Epaphroditus the suffering servant.

But what are we supposed to do with them? How should we respond to these examples of servanthood, especially when we don't have Timothy or Epaphroditus with us today?

This brings us to our last point and the main application of today's message.

Look to and rejoice in living examples of humble servanthood.

Philippians 2:29

[29] So receive him in the Lord with all joy, and honor such men,

Like a good soldier coming back from battle, Paul is telling the Philippians to welcome Epaphroditus and celebrate his return with great joy. Meaning, that there should be an overwhelming sense of gratitude to God that Epaphroditus is well again and that he has completed his mission.

Because he was faithful to Christ even in the face of suffering and completed their ministry and service to Paul and to the cause of the gospel in Rome.

Therefore, Epaphroditus, and others who serve Christ like him, should be honored, praised, respected, and held in high regard. This of course would include Timothy when he comes.

Application:

Now look, we all have examples of people in our lives that we deeply appreciate and admire.

- If you're a professional, maybe you have examples of sustained excellence in their work that you want to emulate.
- If you're a young mom, maybe you have older moms in your life that you admire because of the way they raised their kids.
- If you're a married couple, maybe you have other couples in your life that have shown you how to have a strong marriage that will last a lifetime.
- If you're retired or close to it, maybe you have examples that have gone before you that have given you a picture of how to live the next phase of your life in a meaningful way.
- If you're a young person, maybe you have someone in your life who is a living example of the kind of life you would like to have.

But as good as those examples are, what about examples of Christian servanthood?

Those who love, follow, and honor Christ above all other things. Those who willingly lay aside their own desires and wants so that Christ would be honored, and others would be built up in him. Do we have people like that in our lives, and are we even looking for them?

Example:

For me that example is a man by the name of Dan Hedge. It was the fall of 2000, I was a freshman in college, had been a Christian for less than a year, and was looking for some Christian fellowship. And I remember coming across these three people who were giving spiritual surveys in our dorm lobby during the first week of classes.

Well, one of those people happened to be Dan, and it turns out that he was a volunteer staff member with the CRU ministry on campus. And when I say volunteer staff, this doesn't mean that he helped out every once in a while.

Dan lived roughly 30-35 minutes from campus and worked a full-time job in another town, and yet he spent every free moment he had on campus building college students up in the Lord.

In fact, we developed a bond that first year, and I can remember so many late nights when he probably should have been sleeping, but instead, he invested his time and energy in me so that I could grow and flourish in the Lord.

He truly is an example of Christian servanthood that has affected me to this day and he is one of the big reasons that I believe Christian discipleship is so important.

And my hope this morning, in hearing about examples like this: Whether it's Timothy, Epaphroditus, or even my friend Dan, is that it would cause us to want the following things:

First: That we would begin to believe that selfless servanthood is really at the heart of the gospel.

Christ came to selflessly serve us on the cross and therefore, we are called to selflessly serve others.

Two: That we would show honor and gratitude toward those who serve Christ in this way.

Now I know what you're thinking. Pastor Ryan, if we honor another human being aren't they just receiving vain or empty glory? God should be the one we honor, and he should be the one that gets the glory.

But we need to remember, that Timothy, Epaphroditus, Paul himself, and even my friend Dan are all just living examples of Christ's humble servanthood from Philippians 2:5-11.

They are reflections of the one who didn't count equality with God as a thing to be grasped, but instead, he emptied himself, became a human, was obedient to the Father, and died in our place on the cross.

So when we show honor and gratitude to people like this, what we are praising is Christ's work in them and the ultimate picture of his servanthood that is seen through them. Therefore, the ultimate honor will belong to Jesus and not to man.

Three: That we would be learning from and emulating those who embody the humble servanthood of Christ.

There are a lot of voices in the world and in the church trying to tell us what is right, but there are not a lot of people who are showing us how to faithfully and humbly serve Jesus and others. **So my encouragement to all of us is to look at and follow those who humbly serve Christ.**

Four: That we would become examples of Christian servanthood in the world.

Paul's hope in sending Timothy and Epaphroditus was that the Philippians would begin to live out the same kind of Christ-honoring servanthood that they saw within these men.

He wanted them to be similar examples of selfless servanthood both within their fellowship and within Philippi.

And church, it is my hope and prayer that this kind of Christ-honoring servanthood will begin to permeate our fellowship here at LEFC.

That we will become living examples of the gospel to one another and the world around us so that we can all rejoice together in Christ's work within us. That we can stand in awe of what Christ has done for us. And we can rejoice together as God uses our servant-hearted fellowship to redeem the people around us. Amen!?

Let's Pray.