

## Week 6: Faithful Messengers *Philippians 2:19-30*

### Hook



**Main Point: We advance the Gospel as we serve faithfully.**

### Quiz:

Twenty-five percent of Americans volunteer, according to a survey released by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. Who are these volunteers? Challenge your class to the questions below:

*Which state ranked first in the percentage of people who volunteered?*

- A. Florida      B. Washington      C. Utah      Vermont

Answer: C. Utah ranked first with 43% of residents reporting that they volunteer. Louisiana comes in last at 18%.

*Which age group is most likely to volunteer?*

- A. 20-24      B. 25-34      C. 35-44      D. 45-54

Answer: C. 35-44%

*Which age group is least likely to volunteer?*

- A. 20-24      B. 25-34      C. 35-44      D. 45-54

Answer: A. 20-24

*Who volunteers more, men or women?*

A. Men      B. Women

Answer: B. Women; 28.7% of women volunteer while only 21.8% of men volunteer.<sup>1</sup>

***What organizations have you volunteered with in the past? Which was your favorite and why?***

***What motivates you to volunteer to serve others?***

***How does someone's worldview impact his or her likelihood to serve others? What does a believer's service toward others communicate about the Gospel?***

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.cnn.com/2018/07/19/us/volunteering-statistics-cfc/index.html>

## Week 6, Philippians 2:19-30

### Book

**Main Point:** We advance the Gospel as we serve faithfully.

**Text Summary:** Paul offers two great examples of Christlikeness in Timothy and Epaphroditus. These two men were faithful servants of Christ, fully devoted to the advancement of the Gospel. Timothy faithfully cared for the Christians in Philippi. Epaphroditus faithfully suffered for the Gospel, almost to the point of death. Their examples serve as confirmation for the life to which Paul calls the Philippian church throughout his letter.

### Philippians 2:19-21 [Read]

**Sub-Point 1:** Like Timothy, we must faithfully and genuinely care for others.

In verse 19, Paul transitions from his instructions on Christlike obedience by offering two great examples of men whose lives radiated the light of the Gospel. This passage begins what is known as Paul's "travelogue."<sup>2</sup> While away, Paul intends to send Timothy to the church in Philippi. Timothy was a dear companion in Paul's Gospel ministry. In Philippians 1:1, Timothy is mentioned with Paul as a sender of the letter. This is the same Timothy who joined Paul in Acts 16:1–4 and whom Paul called "my true child in the faith" and his "beloved child" (1 Timothy 1:2; 2 Timothy 1:2).

Though the Philippians knew Timothy, Paul promotes him as an example of faithfulness and someone who would stand out in caring for the believers in this church. In verse 20, Paul says Timothy is "genuinely concerned" for their "welfare." Here, the word "genuinely" (*gnesios*) implies "one who is considered a valid member of a family, legitimate, true."<sup>3</sup> Timothy's love for the Philippians was familial and deep. So much so that Paul says he is "concerned" (*merimnao*), which is typically translated "anxious." Paul wants these Christians to know that Timothy yearns for their growth and faithfulness in Christlike so much so that it affects his spirit. Without question, Paul's own life faithfully demonstrates a deep concern for the Philippians as well.

***How does the Gospel give us new motives for others?***

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<sup>2</sup> Richard R. Melick, *Philippians, Colossians, Philemon*, The New American Commentary vol. 32 (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1991), 116.

<sup>3</sup> G. Walter Hansen, *The Letter to the Philippians*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009), 194.

Paul compares Timothy to those who work and serve out of selfish motivation and not for the sake of Christ (v. 21). Connecting this to the beginning of chapter 2, selfish ambition characterized many within the Christian community. Paul's point concerning Timothy is clear – this faithful brother was unique in his character and devotion to Christ. His concern for the Philippians was not a ploy to get money. In Romans 16:18, Paul says those who spread divisions “do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites, and by smooth talk and flattery they deceive the hearts of the naive.” This was not the case with Timothy. His love, both for the Philippians and for Christ, was faithful and genuine, making him an example of Christlikeness for the church in Philippi.

***Why can selfish motives be so damaging to the spread of the Gospel?***

***How are selfish motives contrary to the Church's mission in advancing the Gospel?***

***What should a believer do if he recognizes that his work is motivated by selfishness?***

Keeping Philippians 2:15 in mind, concerning the call to be blameless and innocent from last week, there is nothing more damaging and debilitating for the Church and its mission than its members all working for themselves, even manipulating others for their own gain. The body of Christ is called to view fellow believers the way Paul and Timothy saw the Philippians. The Christian's concern must be for the growth and faithfulness of other brothers and sisters. Paul's aim is that when the Church lives this way, the Gospel will advance and flourish. The world will see such selflessness and be unable to speak against it (Titus 2:7–8; 1 Peter 2:12).

***How might the Church be blessed when its people care for each other like family?***

**Philippians 2:22-24 [Read]**

**Sub-Point 2:** Like Timothy, we must faithfully carry the message of the Gospel forward.

Continuing his commendation of Timothy, Paul moves beyond Timothy's passion for the Philippians to his passion for Gospel ministry. In fact, it is Timothy's passion for the Gospel that fuels his love and concern for the Philippian believers. In verse 22, Paul again speaks with deep love for Timothy, saying they work together like a father and son, a common metaphor for a teacher and his disciple.<sup>4</sup> His love for Timothy is not as for some occasional volunteer, but as a

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<sup>4</sup> Peter Thomas O'Brien, *The Epistle to the Philippians: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 324.

fellow worker who had been tested and proven true.<sup>5</sup> Unfortunately, Paul had experienced many letdowns from fellow workers (2 Timothy 1:15; 2:17; 4:10, 14). But Timothy was not only faithful to Paul, he was faithful to the ministry.

### ***Why is a faithful messenger important?***

According to verse 22, Timothy had a genuine character and proven faithfulness. As Hansen writes, “Proven character is produced by perseverance in the experience of suffering (Romans 5:3–4), and the evidence of proven character is faithful service that validates a confession of the gospel of Christ.”<sup>6</sup> This quality in Timothy is what Paul so deeply appreciates and calls the Church to. Timothy was a prime example of Christlikeness and living in a manner “worthy of the gospel” (Philippians 1:27).<sup>7</sup> One commentary says it this way: “We are obedient to the gospel and meet its demands when we are active in the ministry of love. This active love is the obedience of the confession of the gospel.”<sup>8</sup> This describes Timothy’s faithfulness to advancing the Gospel and caring for other believers with Gospel sincerity. This is why Paul has confidence to send Timothy in his place (v. 23). Paul would send Timothy as soon as Paul knew how things would go with him (most likely a legal decision); Paul had confidence that he would be released soon.<sup>9</sup>

### ***Why is faithfulness to the Gospel hard for the Church during certain seasons?***

### ***Who are some examples of faithful messengers throughout the narrative of Scripture?***

### ***How does the Church mirror Christ when it practices faithfulness?***

## **Philippians 2:25-30 [Read]**

**Sub-Point 3:** Like Epaphroditus, we must faithfully serve others for the sake of the Gospel at the risk of comfort and safety.

After addressing Timothy, Paul commends his messenger Epaphroditus. There are two important aspects to these verses: One, the faithful companionship between Paul and

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<sup>5</sup> Tony Merida et al., *Exalting Jesus in Philippians*, Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary (Nashville: Holman Reference, 2016), 120.

<sup>6</sup> Hansen, *The Letter to the Philippians*, 196.

<sup>7</sup> Hansen, *The Letter to the Philippians*, 197.

<sup>8</sup> Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey William Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), 2:734.

<sup>9</sup> Robert P. Lightner, “[Philippians](#),” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 657.

Epaphroditus, and two, the faithful service of Epaphroditus for Philippian church and the Gospel.

***How are the descriptions of Timothy and Epaphroditus connected with the previous 18 verses in chapter 2?***

Like Timothy, Epaphroditus was a vital co-laborer in the Gospel with Paul. Paul addresses him as a brother, a fellow worker, a fellow soldier, a messenger and a minister (v. 25). The use of “brother” is a common reference Paul makes in his letters to fellow believers, occurring more than 130 times. The description of “brother” is almost always in the plural or in a general way, “our brother.” Here, Paul makes a unique use, saying, “my brother.” This slight variation gives a glimpse into Paul’s genuine care for him. The words Paul uses in this commendation show a deep friendship and faithful service to one another and the Gospel of Jesus.

After commending the example of Epaphroditus, whom the Philippians knew well, Paul shares his reason for sending Epaphroditus back to them (vv. 26–27). Epaphroditus had a special and dear relationship with the Philippian church, perhaps as a native to the city. Paul describes how, in his sickness, Epaphroditus was concerned for the Philippian church. Even in suffering, he was not primarily worried about himself, but was concerned about his fellow believers. In fact, the only other use of the word for “distress” (*ademoneo*) in the New Testament is when Jesus was in the Garden of Gethsemane (Matthew 26:37; Mark 14:33).<sup>10</sup> Paul calls the Galatians to bear one another’s burdens; sharing the weight of ministry and hardships in the Christian life. Epaphroditus remained committed to this calling above all else.

***Who else throughout Scripture has sacrificed comfort and safety for the sake of God’s glory and His redemptive mission for the world?***

Paul uses the struggle of Epaphroditus as an example of faithful service for the Gospel. Epaphroditus was ill and nearly died. It is quite possible that Paul’s description of Epaphroditus’ near-death experience (Philippians 2:27, 30) was meant to parallel Christ’s work (Philippians 2:8).<sup>11</sup> His selfless service embodied the words of Christ when Christ exhorted his listeners, “Those who want to save their life will lose it, but those who lose their life for Me and for the gospel will save it” (Mark 8:35). Concerning Epaphroditus and his faithfulness, Hansen writes, “Epaphroditus did not make his own safety and security his number one priority; he courageously risked everything, including his own life, to fulfill the mission given to him.”<sup>12</sup> For

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<sup>10</sup> Merida et al., *Exalting Jesus in Philippians*, 125.

<sup>11</sup> Hansen, *The Letter to the Philippians*, 208.

<sup>12</sup> Hansen, *The Letter to the Philippians*, 209.

this reason, in verse 29, Paul tells the Philippians to honor him and rejoice all the more in his return.

***What promises has God given for those in the midst of great trial and difficulty?***

For Paul, true honor cannot be sought out for its own sake but is deserved when people follow in the footsteps of Christ. Paul makes it clear that Epaphroditus' service and sacrifice were not so much for Paul as they were for Christ. Paul explains in verses 29-30 that Epaphroditus risked his life for the work of Christ in taking the Gospel forward and serving his fellow minister, Paul. This is the life of a faithful minister who seeks the advancement of the Gospel above personal comfort, safety and health.

***Why can Christians risk safety and comfort for the Gospel?***

***How might churches and communities be affected if Christ-followers loved Jesus and others the way Epaphroditus did?***

## Week 6, Philippians 2:19-30

### Took

**Main Point: We advance the Gospel as we serve faithfully.**

Though Paul, Timothy and Epaphroditus leave tough shoes to fill, we are, thankfully, only called to be obedient in our own calling. Our task is simply to be faithful with the gifts, skills and opportunities God has given us, and work alongside Him in His mission. In this calling, God will always supply all we need to do what He has called us to do. When we do this, God's mission and His Gospel will advance.

Perhaps it's time for you to get in the game and begin serving others for the sake of the Gospel. Visit [hhbc.com/missions](http://hhbc.com/missions) to discover local and global mission opportunities, consider volunteering in the Children's Ministry or Student Ministry. Maybe there is an unmet need within your Bible Fellowship to which God is calling you. Let's begin to serve like Timothy and Epaphroditus.

***Where/who are you currently serving? What have you learned through this opportunity?***

***Where do you feel a call to serve? Teacher note: challenge your learners to think through concrete steps they may take to move their desire to serve into actual serving.***

### Challenges

***Commit to deep and genuine care for others.*** The world can be full of challenges that make life difficult. These challenges may be natural or products of spiritual warfare. In either case, the joy of believers is knowing God is sovereign over everything. We do not need to be anxious about what we will eat or drink. We should rather be concerned about the fruitfulness and faithfulness of ourselves and our brothers and sisters. Therefore, we live with open hearts and open hands. Pray and stay on the lookout for opportunities to grow in this area. Making excuses to not care for someone may be a sign that this is an area where God is calling you to serve and grow.

***Commit to God's call, no matter the cost.*** Without the Christian perspective, this life is all there is and all the pleasure you can get for yourself. Knowing and believing the Gospel changes everything. We must live with the mindset that nothing on this earth is ours. It all belongs to God, even our very breath. This will help us to lower our guard and begin to genuinely follow wherever God leads us.