

## Serving | Philippians 2:19-30

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Preaching Draft | January 21, 2024

*(Small Group Discussion Questions on Page 7)*

Please turn in your Bible to Philippians 2:19-30, on page 981 of the pew bibles, so that you can follow along with me, to make sure what I am saying is trustworthy and true.

### Intro

What do you think you will be remembered for? What will people say about you at your funeral? Maybe it will be something about how successful you were in business? For your work with the less fortunate? Or your love for your family?

Well in our passage, we are presented with two examples of people who are remembered for their service. People who have embodied what it means to live a life worthy of the gospel, following the pattern of their Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Today is our third and final Sunday in our Disciplines of Disciples series, where we have been focusing on different topics that come up from Paul's letter to the Philippians. Two weeks ago, John spoke to us about prayer, last week Sam looked at Scripture, and today we are focusing on Service.

The important work of prayer and holding fast to the word of God means nothing if they are left in the ivory tower. If they are locked away in our own hearts and have no impact on our lives. Being in prayer and in the word should overflow in service. Service is the fruit of things, that comes by the power of the Holy Spirit.

### Overview

This morning we will both see and sense the call of servanthood through the real-life examples of first Timothy, then Epaphroditus, and last of a local church, just like ours. With Timothy, we'll see what makes service **genuine**; with Epaphroditus, we'll see that genuine service involves **sacrifice**; and then we'll turn to the call of a local church to serve, and ask what that looked like for the Philippians, and what it looks like for us.

1. Timothy - Genuine Service
2. Epaphroditus – Sacrificial Service
3. The Falls Church – Local Service

### 1. Point 1 - Timothy - Genuine Service

Paul deeply cares for the Philippians, he longs to be with them. But he is stuck in prison. So, he decides to send Timothy in order to hear how they are going. The reason why its Timothy he sends, is because there is no one else who is like him, who is genuinely concerned for their welfare.

Look at verses 19 and 20 with me again,

<sup>19</sup> I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, so that I too may be cheered by news of you. <sup>20</sup> For I have no one like him, who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare.

For Paul, it is a universal truth that all people are in want of their own interests. But this is not just Paul, this is the Bible's understanding of all humanity. Apart from Christ, and the Holy Spirit working in us, when we are left to our own devices and desires, we are utterly self-centered. Elsewhere Paul puts it like this, "There is no one righteous, not even one; <sup>11</sup>there is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God. <sup>12</sup>All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one." (Rom. 3:10–12)

#### E.g. – Jonathan Yelling "Mine"

I have two kids, Jonathan who is 2, and Rosemary, who is 10 months old. They have just started playing together with each other. What that actually looks like, is that Rosemary wants to play with, whatever Jonathan is playing with. And what typically happens is that Rosemary crawls over to Jonathan, and starts messing with his toys. After about 10 seconds of this, Jonathan will grab his toys and yell, "No, that's mine!" We didn't teach them that.

Without the Holy Spirit, we all tend towards self-centeredness. But for those in Christ, as the Holy Spirit works in us, change occurs. Through the means of word and prayer, the Spirit starts convicting us, converting us, and renovating our hearts so that they beat more and more in tune with our savior's. Eventually, by God's grace, we can change our focus from self to others. We change from selfish to servant. This is what we see in the example of Timothy.

### Genuine Concern

#### i. Not Casual

But what does it mean that his concern is genuine? One thing it means is that it is not casual.

#### Illustration

Have you ever used the well-meaning phrase, "I will be praying for you"? And you want to pray for the person, but you forget, or you get distracted, and so you return to your normal life, completely forgetting who that person was and what they were telling you. You really mean to pray for them, but other things, other people, take priority over them. And you just wonder to yourself, "are you ever genuine?"

Timothy's concern was genuine. Not only did he pray for the Philippians, but he also gave his time and energy, he re-organized his life and his priorities for their sake. He regarded them as more important than himself. His concern wasn't casual, but he genuinely cared for them, and took the time to show it. He put their interests and the interests of Jesus first.

It is all too **easy to put other things first**. It might be your name and reputation, your happiness, your plans, your family, your success, your future, your retirement, or any endless number of other things that you are putting before God and before serving others.

Many of these things are good things, that require our time, energy, and dedication. But one pattern of sin, is when good things, become the ultimate thing. When we worship these good things, rather than God. When we serve them and use God, rather than serving God with them.

“Timothy put Christ first, together with Christ’s interests, and the other things fell into place naturally.”<sup>1</sup>

### Illustration

Throughout history there have been a number of extraordinary people who have put Jesus first. People like Jim Elliott who was killed as a missionary in Ecuador. Who famously said, *“He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose.”*

Or Hudson Taylor, or Lottie Moon, who were missionaries to China. Or Howard Guinness, of the brewing family, who was sent to Australia, on a one-way ticket, to develop Christian student groups on university campuses. Whose influence largely shaped my call to ministry.

These men and women, sacrificed everything for the sake of Christ, and the work of the gospel.

But look at the SENT booklet that we handed out. In it you will find ordinary people, many people from our church, who are seeking to put Jesus first in their life, and the life of others.

Now I am not saying you have to sell all your earthly possessions and move to the majority world in order to show genuine concern, but let these people be an encouragement to you, and pray for them as they seek to glorify God.

## **Genuine concern is not casual, it puts the needs of others first.**

### ii. Not Surface-level

Which means it is also not surface-level. In order to put the needs of other first, Timothy would have to know what their needs are. He would need to be aware of their physical needs, as well as their spiritual needs. One of ways he served them was through the work of spreading the gospel. In order to be genuine in our concern, we must be alert both to people’s temporal needs, the things they need to survive in this life, but we also need to be aware of their spiritual needs, the things they need to survive for eternity.

How many people do you actually know the needs of?

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<sup>1</sup> James M. Boice, *An Expository Commentary: Philippians* (Zondervan, 178).

You might know your friends, but do you really know what their physical and spiritual needs are?

How many of you know your friends favorite sporting team, but aren't aware of their deepest struggle?

### **Genuine concern is not surface level.**

#### **iii. It is Proven.**

And Genuine concern is tested over time. It is proven to be the real thing.

Paul trusted Timothy and his concern for the Philippians, because it had been tested. Timothy has proven himself. As just like a son with a father, Timothy has served with Paul in the work of sharing the gospel.

#### **e.g. - Like a proven surgeon.**

Imagine you have to under go major brain surgery. What kind of surgeon do you want doing the surgery? Do you want some young punk straight out med school who might be very talented, but has never done this procedure before? Or do you want the experienced surgeon, who has successfully done this surgery many times before. I'm going to want the experienced surgeon.

So, genuine concern is not casual, it is not surface-level, and it is proven.

It seeks to truly see people for who they are and what their physical and spiritual needs are, and it shows up again and again.

Timothy is an example of servant in the likeness Christ. Who even though he was God, he didn't count his power, his status, his privilege, or his rights as something to be used to his own advantage, but he willingly and freely gave them up for you and me. By humbling himself, and taking on our flesh, he gave it all up for us and for our salvation. Jesus was genuinely concerned for us and our welfare.

**[Recap] Timothy is our first example of a servant, he was devoted to others with genuine concern for them, which was proven by how he put them first.**

### [2. Point 2 – Epaphroditus – Sacrificial Service](#)

The second example Paul gives us, is Epaphroditus. He was a Philippian, who was sent as a messenger from Philippi to Paul, with their financial gifts, and to help however he could.

But Epaphroditus is much more than a messenger for Paul. We see in verse 25, how highly he is regarded. He is Paul's brother, his co-worker, his fellow-soldier. They had formed a deep bond working hard and fighting, against the cosmic powers and spiritual forces of evil. And Epaphroditus was there for Paul when the Philippians, and many others, couldn't be. That's why Paul urges the Philippians to honor people like him.

### [Deep Concern](#)

He also admired Epaphroditus because of his deep concern for others. This is seen when Epaphroditus became so anxious when the Philippians heard he was sick, he wanted to be with them to calm their fears.

But the great depth of Epaphroditus' concern is really evident in verse 30.

Look at verses 29 and 30 with me again,

<sup>29</sup> So receive him in the Lord with all joy, and honor such men, <sup>30</sup> for he nearly died for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete what was lacking in your service to me.

Clearly Epaphroditus is worthy of honor. Here is someone of selfless devotion, whose concern is so deep, he was willing to sacrifice himself for others. He was ready risk it all, to serve Jesus and Paul. There is no riskier gamble. There is no greater sacrifice.

### Illustration of Deep Concern/Sacrifice

It is very easy to serve when it doesn't cost us anything. When you can take nice photos of you doing good things, maybe painting a house in an orphanage. You go on a short-term mission trip, help a few people, and get to feel really good about yourself.

But will you serve when it costs you something? When it means sacrificing?

Maybe it costs your reputation, because you are associated with a bible believing church. Maybe it costs you financial strain because you adopt a child, or help provide for struggling family.

Maybe your health because willingly put yourself in danger to protect others.

This is what we see with Epaphroditus, he wasn't doing it for fun. He didn't get any good photos for his social media. His life actually got harder. So hard, that he nearly died.

What motivates Epaphroditus to take such a big risk? Paul connects Epaphroditus' deep concern back to Jesus. He uses the same phrase for Epaphroditus nearly dying, as he does when he talks about Jesus being obedient to the point of death, in verse 8 of this chapter. Epaphroditus was willing to risk his life, because he knew that Jesus had already made the ultimate sacrifice for him. Jesus gave up his life, so that Epaphroditus might be forgiven and brought back into relationship with him.

He probably didn't even see it as a risk/reward. But more of a win-win. Much like with Paul, for Epaphroditus to live is Christ and to die is gain. He can risk it all, because it really isn't a risk at all, it is all reward. Sure, he might lose it all in this life, but he was willing to do that because he knew he had a greater reward in heaven. He knew that is was far better to be a called a fool in this life, so that in the life to come he might be called a good and faithful servant.

[Recap] What we see in the examples of Timothy and Epaphroditus, is they not only think on these things, but they put them into practice. Their love for God and their love for others is seen through their service. And as servants they genuinely cared and sacrificially gave.

### 3. Point 3 - The Falls Church – Local Service

Lastly, serving is not just done by exemplary individuals. [It is also the work of the local church.](#)

We see this all throughout the passage, and particularly in verse 30, where we read that Epaphroditus is completely the service of the Philippian church. He was sent out from them as their chosen servant. We also read in this letter of their partnership in the gospel, and how they had given Paul aid in Thessalonica, and that when he set out from Macedonia, not one church shared with him in the matter of giving and receiving, except the Philippians only. They were a church that served.

**I am so encouraged by all that I have seen since arriving here last August.** It is clear to me that this church is a church that serves. That there are people here who have been so gripped by the love of Christ, that they look for opportunities to love and serve others. My wife, Rachel and I, have already experienced this from many of you. We are so grateful for those who had us over for **thanksgiving dinner, and Christmas lunch.** Who welcome us as **friends into their homes.** Those who have **looked after our children.** And for those who have sacrificed time for our needs. Thank you. That is not to mention the people who have been sent out on mission, who have been sent to serve the poor, and who are sent to be in each other's houses and lives. It really warms my heart and spurs us on. **I am proud to call this my church.**

But brothers and sisters in Christ, let's not take this for granted. This is something we need to keep working at. Because what the first generation believes, the second assumes, and the third loses. So, we need to continually encourage one another to not grow weary in doing good.

#### Made to Serve

Serving is a discipline. It is a discipline that can be learned over time, through hard work, dedication. So, I want to encourage you to think about how you might serve this year. You can start small by serving those who are around you daily, your family or your co-workers. Then reach out to someone on staff and find out how you can serve your church family. Then you think about how God might use you and your gifts and talents to serve people in our local community. There are so many opportunities for us to serve. There is so much work to be done.

But as you put that work in, what you will find is you have been made to serve. Paul tells us, in Galatians 5, is that we have been set free from our slavery to sin and the law, in order that we might serve God. Serving is what we were made for and it is what we have been redeemed for. It is in service to God that we find true freedom. As we lose sight of ourselves, our anxieties, and our issues, as we keep our eyes fixed on him.

#### Conclusion

What do you want to be remembered for?

How big your office was? How well you decorated your house? How fashionable or well educated your children are? Is that what you want your lasting memory to be? Is that what you want your life to be about?

Or do you want to be remembered like Timothy as someone who genuinely cared for the welfare of others.

Or like Epaphroditus who sacrificially served and who, like Christ, was willing to give up everything for the sake of others.

I pray that God would make us more and more like Jesus, who came not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.

I want to **pray for us**, using a prayer from our book of common prayer.

So, let us pray;

*“O God, the light of the minds that know you, the life of the souls that love you, and the strength of the wills that serve you: Help us so to know you that we may truly love you, and so to love you that we may fully serve you, whom to serve is perfect freedom; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen”*

#### Discussion Questions

1. What are some things that stop you from being genuinely concerned for the welfare of others? How might you become more concerned for others welfare?
2. What do you think it means that Timothy served with Paul in the gospel?
3. Who is someone that you know that are like Epaphroditus and should be honored like him?
4. How might you serve?
  - a. Your family?
  - b. Your church?
  - c. Your local community?