

The Book of Philippians

Lesson 6: Two Faithful Servants: Timothy and Epaphroditus -- Philippians

2:19–30

After the soaring hymn about Christ and the bracing call to work out our salvation, Paul does something that might seem like a change of subject. He talks about two men. Timothy and Epaphroditus are not famous. No churches are named after them, no great doctrines hang on their words. They are ordinary servants. And that is exactly why Paul puts them here, right after the portrait of Christ who emptied himself. He is showing us what the mind of Christ looks like wearing work clothes.

Timothy is the young man Paul trusts like a son. Paul says he has no one else like him, no one who will so genuinely care for the Philippians' welfare. While others look after their own interests, Timothy looks after the interests of Jesus Christ. He has proven himself, not in a moment of glory, but in the long, unglamorous labor of serving alongside Paul in the gospel, like a son working beside his father.

Epaphroditus is the man the Philippians had sent to help Paul, and he had nearly died doing it. Paul stacks up titles for him, brother, fellow worker, fellow soldier, messenger, minister to my need. This man poured himself out, risking his life for the work of Christ, and when he fell gravely ill, his first worry was that the Philippians would be worried about him. Paul says to receive him with joy and to honor men like him.

It would be easy to skim past these verses on our way to chapter 3. Do not. In Timothy and Epaphroditus, Paul hands us flesh-and-blood pictures of the self-forgetful love he has been describing. He also teaches the church how to treat such people, with honor. As we study, two questions press on us. Are we becoming the kind of servant these men were? And do we know how to recognize and honor the quiet, faithful servants God has placed among us?

Group Discussion: Paul says of Timothy, "I have no one like him, who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare" (2:20). Who is someone in your life whose genuine concern for others has marked them out, and what did it look like?

Personal Reflection: Paul says most people "seek their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ" (2:21). In an honest week, whose interests are you actually seeking most of the time?

Read Philippians 2:19–30

Study Questions

1. Paul commends Timothy as one who is “genuinely concerned for your welfare” and who seeks “the interests of Jesus Christ” rather than his own (2:20–21). What does this passage teach us marks out a truly faithful servant of Christ?
2. Paul says most people seek their own interests. Where do you see yourself doing this, dressing up self-interest as service? What would it look like this week to genuinely seek someone else’s welfare instead?
3. Paul says Timothy’s “proven worth” was shown as “a son with a father he has served with me in the gospel” (2:22). What does this teach us about how Christian character and usefulness are formed, and about the value of serving alongside more mature believers?
4. Who has helped form you in the faith by letting you serve alongside them, or whom are you helping to form? How could you more intentionally give or receive this kind of side-by-side discipleship?
5. Paul calls Epaphroditus “my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier, and your messenger and minister to my need” (2:25). What do these many titles reveal about the nature and breadth of genuine Christian service?
6. Epaphroditus poured himself out for the work and for Paul. Where is God inviting you to serve in a way that costs you something real, your time, your comfort, or your convenience, rather than only what is left over?
7. Paul says Epaphroditus “nearly died for the work of Christ, risking his life” to serve (2:30), and that God had mercy on him in his illness (2:27). What does this teach us about the value God places on sacrificial service, and about his compassion toward his servants?
8. Think about the quiet, faithful servants in your own congregation, the ones who serve without applause. Are you aware of them? Name one such person you could thank or encourage this week.
9. Paul commands the church to “receive him in the Lord with all joy, and honor such men” (2:29). What does this teach us about how the Lord’s church is to recognize and honor faithful servants, and how does this differ from the way the world hands out status and fame?
10. Look back over the whole passage. In Timothy and Epaphroditus you have seen the mind of Christ in ordinary work clothes. Name one specific way Jesus is using these two servants to form you, whether toward more genuine concern for others, more sacrificial service, or a deeper honoring of the faithful around you.

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: 1 Corinthians 16:15–18, recognizing and giving honor to those devoted to the service of the saints; Mark 10:43–45, greatness in the kingdom found in serving as Christ served; 2 Timothy 2:1–7, entrusting the faith to faithful people and laboring like a

soldier and farmer; 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13, esteeming highly those who labor among you;
Galatians 6:9-10, not growing weary in doing good, especially toward the household of faith.