

INTRODUCTION

If you've ever been on an airline, perhaps you've heard the captain say over the intercom, "Due to weather, we're in a holding pattern." No one likes to hear they're in a holding pattern. Pilots don't like to fly in a holding pattern, because it means flying in circles when you want to be in a straight line. A holding pattern consists of a fix, some point in the air you can determine by navigational instruments and you keep flying to the fix in a racetrack pattern, always coming back to that fix. That is your point of reference.

That's what we've been doing in Philippians chapter two. We've been flying a holding pattern, looking at all the themes in it, but we always come back to our fix, which is Philippians 2:5. "Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus." We keep leaving that and then we keep coming back to that. We learned that Jesus Christ typified humility. When he, being equal with God, descended down the ladder of submission and humility, and Jesus who was God, equal with God, became a man, and descended even further and became a servant, descended even further and died, descended even further and died the death of a common criminal on a cross. Then we circle some more and we learn Paul was also an example of humility. He was willing for his life to be poured out.

Paul said if you want to center on Jesus Christ, don't live a life of murmuring and complaining, instead, shine like a star in the sky and let people know you are Christian by your lifestyle and testimony.

Today, we're going to circle back to that point of "let this mind be in you Christ Jesus," but we're going to make one more holding pattern. We're going to see what it means in our lives to imitate Jesus. You can't imitate Jesus mentally; at least I can't, because He's omniscient. You can't imitate Jesus morally, because He was perfect. None of us here are perfect. And we can't imitate Jesus miraculously, because Jesus could walk on water and none of us can do that. We *can* however, imitate Jesus in meekness and humility.

Mark Twain wrote, "There's nothing quite as irritating as a good example." Today, we're going to look at two ordinary men as examples of humility, Timothy and Epaphroditus.

First, let's review what Paul said from last week. "But even if I am being poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and service coming from your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you. So you too should be glad and rejoice with me." (Philippians 2:17-18)

Let's begin with Timothy first.

Philippians 2:19-24. "I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, that I also may be cheered when I receive news about you. I have no one else like him, who takes a genuine interest in your welfare. For everyone looks out for his own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. But you know that Timothy has proved himself, because as a son with his father he has served with me in the work of the gospel. I hope, therefore, to send him as soon as I see how things go with me. And I am confident in the Lord that I myself will come soon."

I. TIMOTHY: A MODEL OF SERVICE

Timothy is a good example for us. Timothy is not Jesus, nor even an apostle. He's just common, ordinary Timothy. Paul and Timothy make a dynamic duo. There are some people you always think of in connection with someone else: Adam and Eve, Abbott and Costello, Laurel and Hardy, Batman and Robin, Wayne and Garth. Whenever you think of Paul and Timothy, you never think of Timothy alone; always in relationship with Paul.

A. A servant thinks first of others

This is a mark of servanthood. You don't think of yourself first, you think about the other person first. Timothy was one of those guys who was content being number two. Paul wrote, "Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others." (Philippians 2:4) Couple that with "I have no one else like him, who takes a genuine interest in your welfare." (v. 20) Some of the saddest words Paul ever wrote are in Philippians 2:21, "For everyone looks out for his own interests, not those of Jesus Christ." Paul was imprisoned in Rome, and there was a big church in Rome. He had a need to send someone over to Philippi with a message. No doubt there were a lot of people there, but no one else was willing to go because they were more concerned their own affairs. But not Timothy. Timothy thought of others first.

Sometimes people in the church think more of themselves than others. I was speaking to one of our widows this week who said when her husband was dying, she had to wait on him and take care of him and not able to attend church. She got out of the habit of going to church. After her husband died, she didn't want to go back to her old church, simply because of the memories there. So she was looking for another church and finally got up enough courage to visit a Baptist church. She went in with her heart still hurting, not knowing anybody, sat down in a pew and after a few moments a man and woman, walked up to her, tapped her on the shoulder, pointed their finger in her face and said, "You're sitting in our pew. Get up." She got up and walked right out the door and went home.

I don't know if that's ever happened here. I hope to God it never happens here or at least never happens again. But that couple was much more interested in their own needs and wants than the needs of someone else. Sunday after Sunday, people come here who are hurting. You want to know why that song "Achy Breaky Heart" is so popular? Because there are a lot of them out there. When people come and need help, they're not interested in somebody that's concerned about someone sitting in their pew, they want to know how to find help. We need an army of servants who are more concerned about others than themselves.

Jesus taught about true servanthood. "Whoever wants to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and give his life as a ransom for many." (Mark 10:43-45)

You don't hear of many football teams today jumping and bragging, "We're number two! We're number two!" Everybody wants to be number one. A few years ago, a car company bragged about being number two, but the only reason they bragged about it was because they wanted to be number one. I've been told the hardest part in an orchestra is second chair in any instrument,

because it takes humility and submission to be number two. Timothy was always in Paul's shadow and he didn't mind it. Paul said most people were interested in their own desires than those of Jesus Christ. That's true outside the church too.

The September 6, 1992 front page of *The Dallas Morning News* had a picture of Dallas Cowboys Coach Jimmy Johnson next to an article entitled, "Calling His Own Plays" with the kicker "In life as well as in football, here's a man who likes to maintain full control." I'm a Dallas Cowboys fan and Coach Jimmy Johnson seems to be a good coach. But as I read that article, my heart broke about some of the things in his past and what a lonely man he is and how there is absolutely no room for God in his life right now. "Jimmy Johnson never enjoyed a Thanksgiving meal with his family, never celebrated Christmas, never exchanged gifts with his family. Those are traditions that continue to this day." His two sons said their dad's schedule meant living in the same house as their father, but not seeing him for weeks. And when they did see him, there was very little conversation. The article went on to say that this man who is in such a public eye is only close to five people. "I can't let people really know me. I don't want them to ever know me well enough to predict what I will do, that way I always remain in control." When I read those words, I stopped and prayed for God to open Jimmy Johnson's eyes to see the other kind of life that he's missing, that the most important thing in life is not winning a Superbowl. There's more to life, because ten million years from now who won the Superbowl won't matter but what you do with God and how you relate to other people, that's going to matter ten trillion years from today.

B. A servant goes the second mile

"If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles." (Matthew 5:41) During Jesus' time, the Israelites were under Roman occupation. A Roman soldier could walk up to you and hand you their pack and you were bound by Roman law to carry their pack for one mile. The Romans had put out mile markers. Most Jewish people would walk for one mile and not a step further, then they would throw down the pack and walk off in disgust. Jesus said if someone makes you go one mile, when you come to the end of the first mile, go the second mile. He didn't say it here explicitly, but Jesus infers the third, fourth and fifth miles. People notice when you go the second mile and Timothy was willing to do that.

Timothy's first mile was being with Paul in the Roman prison. When Paul said he needed someone to travel 600 miles to Philippi, Timothy said he'd go. Timothy not only went the second mile, he went 600 miles for the apostle Paul. You've got to go the first mile before you can go the second mile. You've got to do what's expected before you can go beyond what's expected.

Those of you in retail sales know the saying "The customer is always right." Service. Companies that are service-oriented are the ones succeeding today. Robert Henry had an encounter in a large retail discount store. He walked up to the camera/binocular counter to buy a pair of binoculars. No one was around. There were two salespersons working there. One of the ladies was unpacking a box and the other was standing there filing her fingernails. Neither one paid him any attention when he walked up to the counter. Finally, after a few moments of no assistance, he cleared his throat and said, "Can I get a little help?" The lady filing her fingernails said, "Take a number." He said, "Take a number? I'm the only one here." "You gotta take a number."

Thinking it was ridiculous, he walked over and took a number, 37. He walked back over and laid the number on the counter. She walked over and called out the number current, 34. She said, "Thirty four!" She waited a few minutes. "Thirty five!" Finally she got to his number. He said, "I'm 37." Without smiling, she looked at him and said, "May I help you?" He said, "No." and walked out.

Those of you in sales probably listened to that in horror at her attitude. But the same is true sometimes when we're trying to help others. If we don't care for them and don't go the second mile, the cause of Christ is often hurt. People notice when you go the second mile. It gives you a chance to give a witness for Jesus Christ. Are you a servant? Do you have a servant's attitude? Are you more concerned about other people's needs?

II. EPAPHRODITUS: A MODEL OF SACRIFICE

Philippians 2:25-30. "But I think it necessary to send back to you Epaphroditus, my brother, fellow worker and fellow soldier, who is also your messenger, whom you sent to take care of my needs. For he longs for all of you and is distressed because you heard he was ill. Indeed he was ill, and almost died. But God had mercy on him, and not on him only but also on me, to spare me sorrow upon sorrow. Therefore I am all the more eager to send him, so that when you see him again you may be glad and I may have less anxiety. Welcome him in the Lord with great joy, and honor men like him, because he almost died for the work of Christ, risking his life to make up for the help you could not give me."

Paul is imprisoned in Rome. A lot of the churches he founded didn't help him. But the little church at Philippi sent a monetary gift to Paul. They gave it to Epaphroditus, whom some believe was one of the pastors at Philippi. He risked his life traveling 600 miles to bring the gift to Paul in person. Paul knew they were concerned about Epaphroditus' illness so he decided to send him back with the letter. Paul wanted them to know he was a model of sacrifice to come to Rome and bring the gift to Paul.

The next part of this message is not going to be popular, because Christians today don't like to hear about sacrifice. They like to hear about sweet by-and-by, streets of gold, gates of pearl. But not sacrifice. A lot of people today are bargain basement Christians—they're looking for a bargain when it comes to Christianity. They want to find a cheap way to get to heaven and have their sins forgiven, but they don't want to hear about this business of long-distance cross carrying, ladder descending, denying yourself, dying to self. Sacrifice is an ugly word to many Christians, but it is an essential word those Christians who totally devoted to Jesus Christ.

What is real sacrifice? As I studied this message, I became convicted in my own heart about how little sacrifice there really is in my life. Most of us are comfortable in our Christianity, we have it so good. There are three ways to discover a life of sacrifice.

A. A life of sacrifice develops relationships

You don't really get to know other believers until you are living a sacrificial life and linked up with another Christian who's living a sacrificial life. Paul had a great relationship with Epaphroditus. Paul began by calling him brother. Paul and Epaphroditus had a family-like relationship. Some of you haven't gotten the gist of what it means to be in relationship with other believers, because you're living in casual, convenient Christianity, not sacrificial Christianity. You can find strength and relationships in discipleship groups.

When a couple in our church discovered a malignancy, they said they couldn't have gotten through the ordeal without their discipleship and Sunday School class. They gathered around, supported and helped them.

It scares me that some of you who come to worship Sunday after Sunday, but you're not in a Sunday School class. I know you like worshipping and singing and listening to the Word, but when your feet get knocked out from under you, there is no support group to hold you up. A Sunday School class allows you to support others and be supported when the time comes for you.

Paul also called him a coworker, a co-laborer, meaning they were in the same line of work. When you work with someone, you have a sort of kinship. As believers, we are linked up in the same business—the King's business. We've got no business doing any other business but his business, which is reaching a lost world for Jesus Christ.

The third phrase Paul used to describe his relationship with Epaphroditus was "fellow soldier." We talked earlier about how Paul uses military terms. You men and women who have been in the military understand the camaraderie created when you serve in the military with someone. Several veterans from World War II tell me they still get together with some of their units. It's a bond. That's what happens when you really live a life of sacrifice and you get to know another Christian who's sacrificing. You're just like two soldiers. The thing that makes soldiers distinctive is their submission to the authority of their commanding officer.

I've enjoyed talking with David Mitchell, one of our church members, who flew for many years in the Air Force as a strategic air command bomber. He flew B52 bombers. He said during the Cold War years, they often took off in the aircraft, loaded with nuclear bombs and sealed orders. If they got to certain point and did not receive a certain coded communication, they were trained to continue with the mission, open the sealed orders and carry out the commands therein. They were sworn to follow through on that mission. Just like in the movies, even if someone called them up and said they'd made a mistake—they wouldn't stop. They would continue until their mission was completed.

That's what makes us fellow soldiers. We're on a mission together, except our orders aren't sealed, unless we seal them ourselves. The Bible gives us our mission and like Paul and Epaphroditus, we're fellow soldiers carrying out the orders of our Commander in Chief.

The greatest relationships in this life are lived in sacrifice with other believers.

B. A life of sacrifice demands risk

I'm not talking about the kind of comfortable Christianity that shows up on Sunday morning, gets a little Cool Whip and then goes home. I'm talking about 24-hour a day, 365 days a year kind of commitment that involves risk. Twice Paul mentions Epaphroditus risked his life. He got sick and almost died. Some of the health and wealth preachers have trouble with verses like that because they believe if you're right with God you won't ever get sick. Epaphroditus got sick. Timothy got sick. Paul got sick—and he was a great apostle. If it's God's will to heal everybody, why did Epaphroditus even get sick? We know why. Sometimes godly Christians do get sick. It is not God's will to heal everyone, although God *did* heal Epaphroditus, but notice it said, "God had mercy on him." It's God who always heals.

Epaphroditus risked his very life for the cause of Christ. Last November, Dana Nottingham spoke at our missions banquet. She and her family were missionaries in East Africa, in an area where there had been no mission work and very few Christians. They spent the first few years developing a relationship with some of the natives there. Finally, she and her husband were invited to a tribal meeting one evening. They sat in a circle and passed a wooden cup with a concoction in it. Each tribal leader drank from it. Even as her husband drank it, he was afraid, because of the unsanitary conditions. But he realized if he didn't drink from it, he would offend the tribe and never be able to preach to them. So he put it to his lips and drank. Not long after that he contracted hepatitis and died in the mission field. They traced the infection back to the evening he drank from the cup. But Dana said if she had it to do over again and if he had it to do over again, he still would have done it. As a result of his death, the door was opened and many of the tribal leaders became Christians because of his sacrifice.

Stories of sacrifice like that convict me right between the eyes and I'm ashamed to tell you how little sacrifice there is in my own life. That's why our missionaries are my heroes. Not only am I proud of them, but God is proud of them.

C. A life of sacrifice deserves respect

"Welcome him in the Lord with great joy, *and honor men like him.*" (vs. 29) Although I had read Philippians literally hundreds of times, I never saw this one little point until recently. The King James Version says, "hold in high esteem men like him." The Bible says when you live a life of sacrifice, those are the kind of Christians we ought to honor and respect. Isn't it sad that in many churches today, we put people who have a lot of money or social standing on a pedestal? The people the church should honor are the servants, those who sacrifice their lives for the cause of Christ.

Hebrews 11 is all about the great roll call of faith: Moses, Abraham, Isaac, etc. But the writer of Hebrews wraps it up by talking about unnamed people who died for Jesus, paying the supreme price. "Some faced jeers and flogging, while still others were chained and put in prison. They were stoned; they were sawed in two; they were put to death by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated—the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground." (Hebrews 11:36-38) Notice it says the world is not worthy of those who make that kind of sacrifice.

When we stand before the Judgment Seat of Christ, I believe those who have made the supreme sacrifice will be the ones most honored.

The early disciples suffered as well. It is said Matthew suffered martyrdom, slain by the sword in Ethiopia. Mark was arrested in Alexandria and cruelly dragged behind a chariot until he died. Luke, the beloved physician, was crucified on an olive tree outside Athens. Peter was crucified upside-down in Rome. James, the brother of John, was thrown from the temple wall and then beaten to death with a club. Bartholomew, one of disciples, was skinned alive in North Africa. Andrew was tied to a cross and brutally beaten to death, but even as he was tormented, he preached to the tormenters. It is believed Thomas went to modern-day India, where he was run through with a spear. Jude was killed by arrows. Matthias was stoned and beheaded. Barnabas was stoned to death in North Africa. Paul, after suffering many beatings and fighting with wild beasts, was beheaded outside Rome. These are the people of whom the world is not worthy.

Can you honestly say your life is a life of service, like Timothy? A life of sacrifice, like Epaphroditus?

CONCLUSION

Chuck Swindoll's book *Laugh Again* contains the story of a 6-year-old girl who contracted a deadly disease requiring a blood transfusion of her same blood type from her family. Her 9-year-old brother had the same kind of blood. So the parents asked the doctor to ask the brother if he would give blood. When the doctor sat down with the little boy and said, "Your little sister needs a blood transfusion. Would you be willing to give blood for her?" The boy pondered for a moment and said, "Yes, I will." So they laid him down in one bed and his sister in another beside him and drained a pint of blood from his body and gave it to his sister as part of the treatment. After they removed the needle and put a Band-Aid over it. The boy had big tears in his eyes and he asked, "Doc, when will I die?" Because he really thought that by giving his blood to his sister, he would die. He didn't. But the desire of his heart was to be willing to sacrifice for his sister.

When Jesus died on the cross and gave His blood, he really did die. And THAT is the supreme model of service and sacrifice.

OUTLINE

I. TIMOTHY: A MODEL OF SERVICE

A true servant:

A. Thinks first of others

"Whoever wants to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and give his life as a ransom for many." *Mark 10:43-45*

B. Goes the second mile

"If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles." *Matthew 5:41*

II. EPAPHRODITUS: A MODEL OF SACRIFICE

A life of sacrifice:

A. Develops relationships

B. Demands risk

C. Deserves respect

"Some faced jeers and flogging, while still others were chained and put in prison. They were stoned; they were sawed in two; they were put to death by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated—the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground." *Hebrews 11:36-38*

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Pastor David Dykes