

Joy in Cherishing Proven Servants

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 04 October 2020

Preacher: Bill Story

[0 : 00] So, who holds your utmost respect?

What kind of person do you so value that you wish to follow them and emulate them?

When I was in high school, that person was Reggie Jackson. He played for the Oakland A's back when they had three World Series in a row.

Won three World Series in a row. He was Mr. October. Super duper star. When he stands next to the athletes of today, he comes up to about their shoulder.

But in my day, he was as tall as they can. I wanted to be like him. He could hit a ball so far.

[1 : 06] He has the registered longest, projected longest home run ever hit. Over 600 feet. 600 feet.

That's twice the fence. So, I used to practice swinging just like him. Touch the glasses.

He would swing so hard that he would screw himself into the ground. Loved it. So, that was when I was a child.

Who do you seek to emulate? Someone that you respect, admire, value, to the extent that you want to be like them, and in fact, imitate them.

Don Carson, in his book, gives an illustration. He says, When I was an undergrad student at McGill University, studying chemistry and mathematics, another Christian student and I began an evangelistic Bible study at the men's dorm where we were living.

[2 : 27] We were both a little nervous and didn't want to be outnumbered, so we invited only three unbelievers, expecting that not more than one or two would show up. It was rather distressing when all three put in an appearance.

I had never done anything like this before. Within a few weeks, 16 students squeezed into my little dorm room, and still only two of us were believers.

Doubtless, some Christian observers thought it was going exceedingly well. As for me, I was exceedingly frightened. The Bible study engendered all kinds of private discussions, and I soon discovered that I was out of my depth.

Mercifully, there was a chap on campus called Dave, a rather brusque grad student who was known to be wonderfully effective in talking to students about his faith and about elementary biblical Christianity.

I was not the only one on occasion who brought friends and contacts for a little chat with Dave. On the particular occasion I have in mind, I brought two of the undergrads from the Bible study down the mountain to Dave's room.

[3 : 36] He was pressed for time, as usual, a bit abrupt, but he offered his coffee and promptly turned to the first student. Why have you come to see me, he asked.

The student replied along these lines, Well, you know, I've been going to this Bible study, and I realize I should probably learn a bit more about Christianity. I'd also like to learn something of Buddhism and Islam and other world religions.

I'm sure I should broaden my perspectives, and this period while I'm a university student seems like a good time to explore religion a little. If you can help me with it, I'd be grateful.

Dave stared at him for a few seconds and then said, I'm sorry, I don't have time for you. My jaw dropped. The student thus addressed was equally nonplussed and blurted out, I beg your pardon.

Dave replied, I'm sorry. I don't mean to be rude, but I only have so much time. I'm a grad student with a heavy program myself. If you have a dilettante's interest in Christianity, I'm sure there are people around who could spend time with you and energy showing you the ropes.

[4 : 49] I can introduce you to some of them if you want. When you're really interested in Christ, come and see me again. But under the present circumstances, I simply don't have the time.

He turned to the second student. Why did you come? After listening to the rebuff administered to the first student, the second may have been a bit cowed, but gamely he plowed on.

I came from what you people would call a liberal home. We don't believe the way you do, but it's a good home, a happy home. My parents loved their children, disciplined us, set a good example, encouraged us to be courteous, honorable, hardworking.

And for the life of me, I can't see that you people who think of yourselves as Christians are any better. Apart from a whole lot of abstract theology, what have you got that I don't have?

This time I held my breath to see what Dave would say. Once again, he stared with his interlocutor, the person for a few seconds, and then he simply said, watch me.

[6 : 06] I suppose my mouth dropped open again. The student whose name was Rick said something like, I'm sorry, I don't understand.

Dave answered, watch me. Come and live with me for a month, if you like. Be my guest. Watch what I do when I get up, what I do when I'm on my own, how I work, how I use my time, how I talk with people, and what my values are.

Come with me wherever I go, and at the end of the month, you tell me if there's any difference. Rick did not take Dave up on his invitation, at least not in exactly those terms, but he did get to know Dave better.

And in due course, Rick became a Christian, married a Christian woman, and the two of them, becoming medical doctors, practice medicine and live out their faith in Canada and overseas.

Watch me. At the time, I worried about the sheer arrogance that such an invitation seemed to capture. At the same time, my mind recalled the words of the Apostle Paul.

[7 : 27] Follow my example as I follow Jesus Christ. Sober observation and reflection assure us that much Christian character is as much caught as taught.

That is, it is picked up by constant association with mature Christians. Watch me. Learn from me.

Observe. We grow up imitating. We imitate our parents. That's how we learn to speak. We imitate our peers.

We imitate our friends, our heroes. This is why advertising works. They sell toothpaste with a beautiful model.

And we're not so, you know, easygoing as to, oh yeah, I'll have beautiful teeth like that if I use that toothpaste. But there's something subtle down below that that still, it works.

[8 : 40] I want to be happy like that person on TV. Maybe I need that. Maybe if I had that car, that color. That's why advertising, we imitate.

It's natural. So, how do we learn to talk Christianly? How do we learn to think Christianly?

To evaluate society Christianly? To witness Christianly? To give, to serve, to develop godly habits.

How do we do that? We imitate proven Christian models. In this chapter now, verses 19 to 30 here in chapter 2, Paul presents for us two proven models.

Two exemplary servants. So, again, let me remind you where we've come from. We've been in Philippians here, and this book is about joy.

[9 : 54] It's about a lot of things, but we've seen joy repeated over and over and over and over again. Joy, remember, is not the same as happiness. Happiness depends on what happens to you.

Happiness is temporary. Happiness is dependent. Joy is something deeper, something transcendent.

Thank you. I'm going to have trouble with bigger words. It's longer than five letters. I'm having trouble. Joy in spite of situations.

Joy through difficulty. That's why I think this subject is so important today. We have lots of troubles, lots of anxieties, lots of difficulties, lots of worries today.

How do we have joy even through that? And so we see what Paul is doing. Paul shares a lot about his own life, his own experience here in Philippians. And in the first 11 verses he talked about how he prays for them with joy because of their participation in the gospel with him.

[11 : 05] He finds joy by their involvement, their participation in ministry. glory. So that's one source of joy for him.

In verses 12 to 18 in chapter 1 he talks about his imprisonment. He's in prison and yet he can still find joy. He's restricted, his freedom's restricted, he's waiting, he's being held up and yet he says I can still find joy.

He says I find joy because actually God has used my imprisonment to advance the gospel. because every guard that gets tied up to me gets to hear the gospel. He says the whole praetorian guard has heard the gospel.

So I'm excited and then he says also because of my imprisonment Christians outside the prison are more excited and preaching the gospel. He said so man this is great, I'm rejoicing.

And then he says now some of those people outside the prison are preaching the gospel with good motives. Some of them are doing it in a way to try to hurt me, trying to afflict me.

[12 : 16] And he says you know what? I still rejoice because Christ is still preached. Whether they're doing it from good motives or bad motives, they're still preaching Christ and that's what matters.

So I rejoice in that. And then in verses 19 to 26 in chapter 1 he talks about his uncertain expectations. He says I don't know if I'm going to live or die. I'm sitting here in prison waiting for Caesar's thumbs up or thumbs down.

I'm accused of being an agitator of the state because you know riots start when we shut down moral issues immoral issues.

So he's waiting to see. He says I don't know. It's uncertain but I can still rejoice. And he says bottom line okay do I live or die?

Well for me to live is Christ. To die is gay. So when I think about it in a big picture okay if I die I win.

[13 : 23] I go home. I'm with Christ. If I live well I live for Christ. I live for Christ. Christ. So either way I'm good.

And I'm convinced he says that I'm staying for your joy and for your progress in the faith. So he finds joy in shared ministry and personal affliction uncertain expectations and then in chapter two he talks about complete my joy by being of the same mind.

Find joy in selfless unity. Complete my joy. So he says I've already got joy. I got joy for ministry in my affliction. I got joy in living for Christ.

But you know what? You guys could top my joy off. You could fill up my brim and this is what would do it. Your unity. How you treat one another.

Not unity like you get organized and do a project together. I'm talking about unity where you think the same toward one another. Where you love one another the same. Where you are humble toward one another.

[14 : 29] Where you care about each other's interests. That unity. That will complete my joy. That would fill up my joy to know that you are living like that.

And then he goes on and talks about complete my joy by thinking like Jesus. Jesus is the example of that kind of selfless unity. Because Jesus was on his throne.

Though he existed in the very form of God did not regard his equality with God as a thing to be exploited but emptied himself, humbled himself, took on flesh, and humbled himself to the point of obedience even to death on a cross.

He's the great example of selfless unity. Living for others in other words. Not thinking too highly of himself. Though he had every right to think highly of himself.

He's God. God. And even in that state thought of us. Emptied himself. Became a servant. Think like Jesus.

[15 : 33] That brings joy. And then last time what we looked at in chapter 2, 12 to 18, is joy in sacrificial witness. He talks about we are lights in the world.

And how do you become lights in the world? Verse 14, he says, by doing all things without grumbling or questioning. You know how simple it is to become blameless and light in the world?

Just don't grumble. It's pretty simple. Don't grumble. Do all things without grumbling or disputing that you may be blameless.

Innocent children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and twisted generation. Among whom you shine as lights in the world.

How can I be a light in the world? Stop grumbling. Really? That's it? All the hell.

[16 : 39] But grumbling is the most natural thing in the world. I know. It is natural. It's what the world does. It's what we do. It's what we do. And if we do without it, you will shine like a light.

And he says at the end of that, be glad with me and rejoice with me in this sacrificial witness. So those are some of the sources of joy for Paul.

Ministry affliction, expectations, unity, thinking like Jesus and witness. Now he comes to one more. And once again, he mentions joy and rejoicing in relation to these two men that he's going to present for us.

He sets before us two Christian models. People he says to honor, honor such men. Receive Epaphroditus with all joy.

joy. So joy in relation to people. Do people bring you joy? Now that little one right there.

[17 : 56] I came in and saw her smile and they brought me joy. Yeah, of course people bring you joy. What kind of people bring you joy? Little cute ones?

Yeah, that's easy. What about the big not so cute one? Yeah, of course.

And so here we're talking about finding joy in cherishing exemplary servants. Paul urges us to receive with joy and honor those who embody Christ-like lives.

And so he gives us two examples here. Timothy in verses 19 to 24 and then in verses 25 to 30 Epaphroditus. So simply two examples he's going to bring. So his first model is Timothy.

He says in verse 19, I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon. Notice how he says that by the way. He doesn't say I just hope to send Timothy to you. I hope in the Lord to send Timothy to you.

[19 : 02] I have plans and expectations but my plans are subject to the Lord. I hope in the Lord. Lord willing.

So he's recognized that. That's how he lives. Remember he lives to live as Christ to die as gain. To live as Christ means that whatever I do is in the Lord's plan. I'm thinking along his lines.

But this is my plan. I hope to send Timothy to you soon. So Timothy, what kind of person is Timothy? I think we're going to find out that he's a selfless and proven servant.

Timothy's one of Paul's, if not his most right hand man. We know a lot about Timothy because in the New Testament he's mentioned all over the place.

He started following Paul in Paul's first missionary journey way back in Acts 16. He's gone with Paul all over the place. Half of the letters that Paul writes are addressed Paul and Timothy to the church.

[20 : 06] So he's constantly been with Paul. He's been trained by Paul. And then Timothy's also been a guy that Paul has had so much trust and faith in that he sends him to hard situations.

He sent him to the church of Corinth. Now if you read Corinthians you know that's a troubled church. Timothy, go to Corinth. Set things in order.

Teach. Organize. He sent him to Ephesus. Ephesus is a big church. Lots of issues. Gentile church.

Issues between Jews and Gentiles there. Timothy, go to Ephesus. Set things in order. Organize the church. Get the elders established there.

He also sent him to Thessalonica. So there's at least three churches and now four he's going to send him to Philippi. And Paul has complete trust in Timothy to go and lead that church for a while or train that church or organize the church or whatever.

[21 : 07] Help them get things together. So here's Timothy. He sends him, he says in verse 19, I'm sending him to you soon.

Why? So that I may too be cheered by news of you. So he wants to hear back about them. He's going to exchange reports. I want news of you and I know you want news of me.

Down in verse 23 and 24. I hope therefore to send him as soon as I see how it goes with me. So he's holding on to Timothy and as soon as he finds out Caesar's up or down, then I'm sending Timothy so I can let you know.

So I'm sending him to tell you how it goes with me and then I'm sending him to go find out how it goes with you. In other words, I think before he sent Timothy, he sends Epaphroditus.

Okay, this isn't in chronological order. Epaphroditus is the one carrying the letter to the church. Okay? So he sent Epaphroditus and then with the letter, and then in the letter he's saying, the next one I'm sending is Timothy.

[22 : 18] Because I want to see how it goes with you. In other words, how'd you take the letter? How'd you respond to the letter? And I know Timothy will give me an honest answer.

I know Timothy has the discernment to recognize, did the two ladies patch things up? Have you worked on unity? How's the grumbling going?

Right? How'd things go with you? So, a little correspondence going on there. So there's three visits really going on. He sends Epaphroditus back first with the letter, then he's going to send Timothy after he knows if he's up or down, and then he plans to come himself.

He says in verse 24, I trust in the Lord that shortly I myself will come too. I'm planning to come. So lots of visits. Now, why Timothy?

Look at verse 20. Why Timothy? He says, for I have no one like him. It's quite a statement. I have no one like him.

[23 : 27] He is an extraordinary person. Literally, I have no one of equal soul. He's a kindred spirit with me.

How so? He says, who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare? I want you to understand something about Timothy. What you see is what you get.

He's a genuine guy. He's a real guy. He doesn't fake it. When he shows that he cares for you, he really cares for you. He genuinely cares for you.

So know when he comes, he's really going to shepherd you. He's really going to care about you. He's really going to get involved in your lives and come right alongside. And actually, it's really interesting the word Paul uses for concern here, genuinely concerned.

It's the word for anxiety. It's the word that Paul uses in chapter four where he says, be anxious for nothing but by prayer and supplication, right? Don't be anxious. Same word.

[24 : 44] He's genuinely anxious for you. We think, well, anxiety, that's bad, right? That's worry and, well, in regard to myself, but not in regard to others.

He's anxious for you. He worries about you. Not in a bad way, a good way. He's genuinely concerned, worried.

Interesting. For others. He's a selfless guy. He goes on in verse 21. For they all seek their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. Timothy's the kind of guy that doesn't seek his own interests, but seeks the interests of Jesus Christ.

What are the interests of Jesus Christ, by the way, in this context? His church. He'll be concerned about you. He'll be concerned about the Philippian church.

That's what Jesus is concerned about. What are the interests of Jesus? His body. His church. So back in, earlier in chapter 2 where it said, you know, I want you to have selfless unity.

[25 : 51] I want you to complete my joy with being of the same mind. Not caring about just your own interests, but for the interests of others. Here's an example of somebody just like that.

Timothy's like that. He's not just self-focused on his own interests. He cares about the interests of others. which are, by the way, the interests of Jesus.

Jesus is concerned about the interests of the church. That's what Timothy will be concerned with. The needs of the body. So what kind of example is Timothy? Look at verse 22. What kind of person is he?

You know Timothy's proven worth. How as a son with a father he has served with me in the gospel. His character.

You know his proven worth. You know Timothy. You've met him before. He's been there before. He's been there with me when we started the church. Timothy was there.

[26 : 53] You got to know Timothy. You know him. You know his proven worth. What's proven worth? How do you get proven worth?

How can I get some of that? A track record. Yeah, the word proven there actually means tested. Tested, approved.

It's the same word that they use when they talk about testing metals. Right? They burn the dross off and they purify it. Right? It's been under fire. So, he's proven because he's been tested.

He's been through the fire. He's been through the difficulties. He's been through the trials. He's suffered and sacrificed and come out the other side. He's proven.

Doesn't mean he's perfect but he's been tested. He's been approved. approved. He's got the scars. He's got the t-shirt.

[27 : 57] Right? He's been through the hard stuff. He's a consistent example. He's proven. How did he demonstrate that?

I see that in verse 22 as well. How as a son with a father he served with me in the gospel. He served alongside in the gospel. He's been faithful in the ministry. He's been faithful with me serving in the gospel.

He's like a son. Interesting. Paul calls him a son. This is probably one of Paul's closest friends. Although Paul obviously being older and the mentor and the teacher but thinks of him like a son.

This is my boy. He's devoted, loyal. Not just a worker. He's like a son. He's proven.

His character's been tested. So let me ask the question. How do you develop a proven character? How do you develop proven worth?

[29 : 04] And what produces it? Well, you might have a hint. Paul talks about it in Romans 5. Listen to these words. He says, therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

So he's talking about our salvation. We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Why? Because we've been justified by faith. Through him we also have obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

So we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. we're saved. We stand in grace. We're good. God has put a stamp of approval on us. He's called us okay, forgiven.

We rejoice in that. But then he goes on. Watch this. Not only that, but we rejoice in something else. We rejoice in our sufferings.

Okay, wait, now he's gone too far. He's talking about who rejoices in their sufferings. Why would you rejoice in your suffering? Watch what he says.

[30 : 18] We rejoice in our sufferings knowing something. We know something. We understand something. We have a mindset. We recognize something important.

We rejoice in our sufferings knowing that suffering produces endurance endurance and endurance produces character.

Tested. Proven character. Proven worth. Same word here. Endurance produces character. Provenness.

And character, look at this, character produces hope. Isn't that interesting? Hope comes from character, which comes from endurance, which comes from suffering.

So wait a minute. To get to hope, I go through suffering first, I endure suffering, I get character, then I get hope.

[31 : 26] Do I got to wait for that? No, of course not. We're talking about an enlarged hope. We already have hope when we're saved. We've already experienced hope.

Born again to a living hope, right? We just talk about another level of hope. Character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. Look at how God works in us. Proven character comes through suffering, through trial, through testing, by which we endure and produce or gain provenness.

So the question is, okay, great, you know, suffering, we rejoice in our suffering so suffering produces endurance, endurance produces character. Okay, I want the character thing, I don't know that I want the suffering thing.

So how do I do through suffering? How do I get there? How do I get proven? How do I do well in the suffering and endure it in order to gain character?

[32 : 53] What did he say there in Romans 5? He talks about standing in grace. He talks about the Holy Spirit who has been poured out into our hearts. We have the resources as a believer to endure suffering, to endure it well.

We don't do it in our own strength. If I do it in my own strength then I'm going to wear out and get discouraged and fall off. Maybe I could stand for a little while but I need the power of the Holy Spirit.

I need the grace of God. I need this faith to continue to trust and rely on him through this as I'm suffering. Okay, Lord, give me strength right now.

I'm going to think and lean on you. I'm depending on him and his grace. And he gets me through that. He does not leave us to ourselves.

So, he gives us an example of Timothy, first of all, a selfless and proven servant. And he's going to tell us in verse 29, to receive Epaphroditus with joy and to honor such men like Epaphroditus and Timothy, people like that.

[34 : 14] So, now in verse 25, he goes to a second example, Epaphroditus. What do we call Epaphroditus? We were trying to think downstairs what else we could call him because it's kind of a Epaphroditus.

It doesn't roll off the tongue that well. He doesn't have a Christian name. Epap, Epap, Epaph, Rhodi, Dydus, I don't know, Bob, Bob, Drobnny.

All right. He's named after Aphrodite. Aphrodite. Aphrodite. So, he does not have a Christian name.

He obviously did not grow up in a Christian home. Grew up in a Greek home. Worshippers of the Greek pantheon. So, that's what I'm saying.

A guy needs another name. such as God sanctifies that. Even, you know, God, Paul doesn't tell him, oh, you've got to have a new name now. No, still call you Epaphroditus.

[35 : 29] What kind of guy is he? Well, I would summarize him as a caring and self-sacrificing servant. A caring and self-sacrificing servant.

I want you to see how Paul describes him. Here's a guy now who comes to Paul bringing a gift. We know from the end of the letter he talks about the gift that Epaphroditus brought to Paul.

That was refreshing. It was a fragrant aroma. It filled his needs. Okay? So, remember, Paul is sitting in prison. He can't get out. Can't do, you know, he's dependent on people outside to supply his needs.

This is a Roman prison, not a United States jail. No rights. Okay? You're in a dungeon. And you're, you kind of just fair on your own.

Hopefully you have some friends that can bring you clothing in the winter, that can bring you essentials that you need. So, the church in Philippi is so concerned about Paul, they've sent Epaphroditus to go minister to Paul's needs.

- [36 : 40] He's bringing a gift, probably a money gift, which means that Epaphroditus probably did not come by himself. He's probably got a Simon the Zealot and a couple of sword bearers along with him to make this journey.

By the way, it's an 800 mile journey. From Philippi to Italy, Rome, 800 miles crossing that Mediterranean inlet deal, whatever that's called.

800 miles. That's going to take about in those days without cars, trains, primarily walking, 40 to 50 days.

Okay? So, Epaphroditus has gone to Paul. Okay? And then he's going to come back from Paul with the letter. He's gone to Paul. He is bringing the gift.

So, what kind of guy is Epaphroditus? He's just a guy bringing the gift. And then when he gets there, he's going to serve Paul. He's the representative for the church who can't be there with Paul, so they send Epaphroditus to go be with Paul, bring him the gift, here's the money, take care of him.

- [38 : 05] What does he need? Whatever he needs, take care of him. He needs clothes, he needs books, he needs food, he needs supplies, he needs health stuff, you get him whatever he needs. We want to take care of him and you're our guy to take care of him.

Stay there as long as you need to take care of him. So that Paul can do what he needs to be doing, like writing letters and ministering to people that come into him and he can disciple and teach them and spread the gospel to the Roman guards.

Make sure you take care of Paul. We really care about Paul. So that's what they're doing. So how does Paul view this guy? He's just kind of bringing the letter.

He's not like a front line missionary. He's just a guy bringing the message. Just a guy bringing the gift. How highly should we value somebody like that?

What does Paul think about him? What does he call him? Look at verse 25. Paul thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus. He's going to give three terms in relation to Paul.

- [39 : 10] He's my brother, my fellow worker, and my fellow soldier. Think of those terms. He's my brother, which means Christian brother. He's my fellow worker, which means, wait a minute, he's not just an assistant, he's a worker.

He's a fellow worker. He's in the work. What work? Well, the work of the gospel. Well, and then he calls him a soldier, fellow soldier. What's that mean? That means he's paid some prices.

He's got some scars. He's been in the battle. He's suffered. He's a soldier. He doesn't say that about Timothy.

When he writes to Timothy, he tells Timothy, be a good soldier. But none call Timothy a soldier. Timothy's kind of this gentle, I love Timothy, by the way.

We know a lot about him. Gentle, kind of timid, right? Come on, come on, Timothy, come on. Very trustworthy, very faithful guy, but a little, you know, a little gun shy, a little amiable.

- [40 : 19] Epaphroditus, what do you want me to do? Send me in, coach. Ready to go. What do you need? I'll take him.

You need me to run something down? Timothy, it's like, Timothy, would you, would you, oh, yeah, go, yeah, go. You know, it's kind of like that.

Two totally different personalities. Okay? He's a soldier. And then he says, he's your messenger and your minister. Your messenger because you're the ones who sent him.

Epaphroditus is from Philippi. He brought the gift. He's their person, their representative. He brought the gift. He's going to return with the letter.

He's also your minister, he says, to my need. Interesting. Your messenger and minister to my need. Now, this word minister, we're used to the word minister in the Greek being this diakonos kind of word, very common minister, servant word.

[41 : 27] Paul doesn't use this word. He uses a different word. And whenever he does that, it makes me go, why did he use that word? And the word is, well, it translates into our language as liturgy.

Liturgy. You know what liturgy is? If you grew up in the high church, right, you had, they call it a liturgical service. It means serve. So we call the worship service, the worship liturgy.

And it came to mean kind of the order of the service, right? The particular things that were done in the service, the way that we worship. It's a word that carries over from the Old Testament.

It's the Greek word of a Hebrew word that meant the work of the priests. So what the priests did in their worship, preparing a sacrifice.

So it's kind of like, okay, so why does Paul use this word for servant? He's your liturgy. He's your worship service to me.

[42 : 36] So he's not just a servant. He's a worshiper of God in the act that he does. His coming to Paul with the gift is an offering.

It's a sacrifice. Because remember, it's going to take 40, 50 days to go one way. He's probably planned to stay there for a while to take care of Paul.

He's taken a half year, a year off of his life to go serve Paul. That's a sacrifice does he have family? Does he have business? Does he have nothing to do?

This is a doer guy. I think he probably has plenty to do. But he has said, I'll do it. I'll go. I'll make that long journey.

See, worship, liturgy, is more than what we do on Sunday morning. We call this a worship service. And that's right. We worship. We worship by our singing, by our prayers, by hearing God speak to us.

[43 : 49] That's part of worship. But worship's bigger than that, isn't it? Remember, Jesus said, hey, the temple was the place of worship, but now it's worship in spirit and truth.

Not about a place. Or at least it's not limited to a place. Worship in my life. What I do at my job can be an act of worship because I do it for the Lord.

So my whole life can be an act of worship. This guy's journey to go to Paul was an act of worship, to honor Christ and serve Paul. So why does he send him?

Verse 26. Why does he send him? Because the impression is that I'm sending Epaphroditus back a little bit soon. Like something happened and now I need to send him back.

So why? Well, look what he says. I found it necessary, verse 25, to send you Epaphroditus, my brother, fellow worker, fellow soldier, your messenger minister to my need.

[45 : 03] Why? For he has been longing for you all and has been distressed because you heard he was ill. What kind of reason is that to send him back?

I'm sending him back because of his concern for you. One, he's longing for you all. I get the picture of Epaphroditus as a feeler guy.

He's affected. He's not one of those kind of doers that's just like, you know, he's like a doer that's like people oriented. He's longing for you all.

Pathos. He's missing you. He has an affection for you. He's homesick. Emotional yearning.

And then it says he's been distressed. distressed. And what distresses him? He's distressed because you heard he was ill.

[46 : 10] He's not distressed because he was ill. He's distressed because you heard he was ill. You know people like that? I'm not like that.

When I get ill, I'm distressed about me. I'm like really rough. You know, it's like, oh man, I'm gonna die. other people, they're sick.

Oh, are you okay? Don't worry about me. You know, they're like more concerned about the other person than themselves. I'm not like that.

I hate to say. He's in anguish. Now, how did they hear he was sick? And we don't know how he got sick, how he got ill.

Obviously, it was the journey. We don't know if he got sick on the journey or if he got sick getting there. My impression is that he pushed all the way through, got there and fell apart.

[47 : 13] Right? A long journey, the tedious thing. But somehow along the way, somebody in the party that was going with him must have gone back and told the Philippians, Epaphroditus got sick.

Because he says, he's now heard that you heard that he's sick and now he's distressed. He didn't want to worry you. He didn't want to concern you.

And now he's all up in arms and, oh man, man, I got to get home, I got to get home. They got to know I'm okay. I don't want him all anxious and distressed. You know, this kind of guy he is. And then I want you to notice Paul describes his cost in verse 27, the sacrifice this man is willing to make.

He says, he was distressed because you heard that he was ill. Verse 27, well, indeed he was ill, near to death. that's pretty ill, I think.

Didn't just have a fever. It wasn't just worn down. He almost died. Came to death's door, or window, whatever you call it.

[48 : 34] Near to death. But God had mercy on him. You know, when you recover, that's a mercy.

And you go, well, that's a mercy. It's a mercy of God. And notice he says, it's not just mercy on him, but also on me.

Lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow. That's interesting. We get a little insight into Paul. I don't know what you think of Paul, what he's like. He was more of a people person than I think he gets credit for.

People think of him as the kind of the theologian, the teacher, the kind of the kind of off. Man, I was worried to death for Epaphroditus. And I bet he felt partially responsible because Epaphroditus came to help him.

Oh, if Epaphroditus died coming to serve me? Sorrow. So he already has a sorrow that he's got sick. And then God has mercy by sparing him the next sorrow of losing him.

[49 : 42] But it's also interesting because we're talking about joy, right? And here he mentions sorrow in the midst of joy. See, sorrow does not eliminate joy.

It eliminates happiness, but it doesn't eliminate joy. He can still have joy even through the experience of sorrow. sorrow. Why?

It's not because of what has happened, it's because of the perspective. It's because of recognizing okay to live as Christ. God has things in control.

I can trust him. I can have joy. Not laughing crazily kind of joy, but inner joy, deeper joy.

So he comes near to death and then it says, so go down to verse 30. He mentions again, he nearly died for the work of Christ.

[50 : 53] So he didn't just nearly die because, oh, he's a simple messenger, took a long trip, maybe pushed himself too hard, shouldn't have done that, nearly died, oh, you know.

No, what he was doing was the work of Christ. I want you to recognize what Paul values in Epaphroditus. Epaphroditus is not a front leader.

He's not a main missionary. He's not a main teacher. He's not an up-front guy, probably. He's a behind the scenes, carrying the gift, carrying the letter.

He's just a servant. He's a brave servant. But he says he's doing the work of Christ.

That's still the work of Christ. When you serve in the church, when you serve Christ, even if you're not, you know, in some known position, I serve by praying for people.

[52 : 04] That's the work of Christ. I serve by, you know, I have people over and chat. That's the work of Christ. When I'm helping out with the work day, or whatever, it's the work of Christ.

I come early on Sundays and stay late so that I can talk with people. That's the work of Christ. I call people, I send cards, especially during this time, I worry about so-and-so and so-and-so.

That's the work of Christ. See, Paul holds Epaphroditus in high esteem. Even though what the world would say about Epaphroditus is, you know, he's just one of them.

He's just an assistant. He's not anybody important. Don't tell Paul that. Man, this guy's so important. You need to honor him.

He should be held in high esteem. This man. He nearly died.

[53 : 19] He was willing to pay the price for his mission. In his determination to fulfill his service, he risked his life.

He risked his soul. Look how he says in verse 30, he nearly died for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete what was lacking in your service to me.

To fulfill his mission, he was determined to fulfill his mission. My impression is he got sick on the way. He got weaker and weaker, but he pressed on.

I've got a mission to complete. No, Paul needs this. Get it there. Come on, guys. Okay, you got to carry me fine. Let's get there.

No, you should rest. We need to get there. He risked his life. Literally, he risked his soul. He exposed himself to danger.

[54 : 19] In a sense, he handed over his life. He does not turn back. He's ready to pay the price. You know people like that? That will serve to that end?

Not reckless. I don't think he was reckless. I think he was just so determined. You know when guys can get like that, oh, I'm fine. Pay for it later.

And it's not the macho thing. It's more, I've got a service to do. I've got a service to complete. And it's interesting, he talks about what was lacking in your service.

It's not that they were lacking, it's that they weren't present. He's their emissary. He's there on their behalf. They couldn't, so that's why they sent him. So he's going, I got to do this.

I'm doing it for the church. I'm doing it for Christ. I'm doing it for Paul. Got to do it. He's willing to sacrifice to pay the price. So, last point here.

[55 : 20] What do we do with people like this? How should we regard such people? Timothy's, the gentle and selfless servants, the Epaphrodituses who are caring and self-sacrificing.

How do we regard such people? Look at verse 29. He tells us two things. Receive him in the Lord with all joy and honor such men.

Receive him with all joy. Epaphroditus. Man, when that guy gets there, you guys got to throw a party. He's back from the dead.

You're going to be excited to see him. He's going to be excited. Well, you're going to rejoice. Deeper than excitement. Rejoice. Rejoice in him.

Welcome him with all joy. Accept him. Receive him with joy and gladness. And then he says honor such men. Literally hold in honor such men, such people.

[56 : 32] People who are caring and self-sacrificing. People who are gentle and selfless. People who are Christ-like. Who not just focus on their own interests, but the interests of others.

Hold people like that in the highest regard. We tend to, in this world, hold people in honor who accomplish a lot.

They achieve a lot. The Reggie Jacksons of the world. Because they're impressive in some way. Paul says, man, I look deeper.

It's not about what they accomplish. It's about who they are. It's about how they treat people. Because that's the highest value.

Because that's how Jesus treated us. And how he calls us to treat one another. To be thinking of each other, not just ourselves.

[57 : 38] And in a time like this, what's everybody thinking about? About me, what's going to happen? Oh boy, what's going to happen? Thinking about others.

It doesn't change. The times that we're in doesn't change who we are, what our priorities are. So, honor them. This word honor means to prize them, to value them, to regard them as precious.

precious. Do you regard people as precious? Like, where'd you go? The little one, you know, we think autumn, oh precious.

Right? Do I think of servants like that? The quiet Timothys, the go-getter Epaphroditus.

Wow, what a God. You think of the servants in our flock, we have a number of them. People are very conscious of other people, thinking of others, doing stuff without getting noticed.

[58 : 53] When you see them, do you value them? Do you know how precious they are? How rare they are? That's what makes them precious.

1 Thessalonians 5 talks about esteeming people among us who labor among us. He says, we ask you brothers to respect or to get to know those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, to esteem them very highly in love because of their work, to esteem them, to regard them, to consider, value that.

Do you value selfless servants? Those who have been tested and come through the test and there's consistent guys? Do we take those guys for granted, those women for granted that have been through it and they're still here, they're still serving, they're still writing those notes, they're still praying for people, they're still reaching out and touching people.

Do we value that? Or have we lost sight? Hebrews 13 talks about remember your leaders, those who spoke the word to you, consider, observe carefully the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith.

Interesting. Look at certain people, there's certain people to watch, there's certain people to observe carefully their outcome of way of life.

[60 : 28] There's certain people we should see their faith and learn to imitate that faith. That's what we were talking about earlier, that modeling. Watch me.

See how I live. See what I do. See how I talk. See how I interact with believers, unbelievers.

Neighbors. Right? Do we have somebody to observe to see, oh that's what it looks like. See what does it look like to be a caring person?

Look at Epaphroditus. You know what it looks like to be a caring person? Longing for them and really anxious that they've heard that I'm sick.

In other words, I'm so concerned about them. That's what it looks like to be a caring person. What does it look like to lay down your life?

[61 : 35] Looks like Epaphroditus making a journey that says, I got to get this done. so do you welcome such servants with joy?

Do you find delight in their work? This is what he's talking about. Welcome them with joy. Do you see them as precious, honorable, worthy of all respect?

I asked you a question when we began, who do you hold in utmost respect? respect? Who do you hold up? Who do you respect so much that you want to follow them and imitate them?

Not because they're impressive in an external way, because the kind of people they are. I want to care for people like that person cares. I want to learn to be like that.

I need to hang around that person. I need to go ask them, hey, can I live with you for a month?

[62 : 40] Well, or at least, can we get together once in a while? Right? I want to learn to be like that. Honor such selfless servants, because they give their lives for the work of Christ.

Let's pray. Father, we thank you for your word. We thank you for Paul's just kind of opening up his life, opening up not only how he thinks and reacts to things, how he finds joy in the midst of affliction, but Father, how he presents others, how he views others, how he holds in honor these men who are not big impressive guys, but simply servants, caring people.

And, Father, may we learn to cherish those kind of people. And may, Father, those people rub off on us.

We pray in Christ's name. Amen.