

**Portraits of Servanthood**  
*Philippians 2:19-30*

This morning I want to give you some insider information about our approach to preaching here at Faith. We teach the Scriptures with the conviction that if you are a believer in Jesus, your deepest desire is to receive and experience God's Word. Along with Paul in Romans 7, all believers say, "I joyfully concur with the law of God in my inner being" (Romans 7:22). In the deepest part of our being, when we hear God's Word, we internally say "Yes! That's true and good. I want my life to reflect God's Word."

The good news is that I never stand up here thinking, "I'm going to try to get these people to do something they really don't want to do." Rather, I'm up here thinking just the opposite: "If we as believers genuinely understand what this Scripture teaches, we will want to live it out. We find deep satisfaction in God's Word." This doesn't mean that it's always easy or simple; it might be very difficult and complex. And for a variety of reasons we sometimes resist the Word. But deep down we want to live it out. This is true for many reasons. One reason is that the same Spirit who inspired God's Word dwells within us and writes it on our hearts.

What does this mean for us today? In today's passage, Philippians 2:19-30, Paul commends the servanthood of two specific men, Timothy and Epaphroditus. I teach this morning with the conviction if you are a believer, you genuinely want to embody the type of servanthood we're discussing. In the deepest part of your being you know that servanthood is far superior to selfishness. I'd like to pray now and invite God to speak deeply to our hearts and impress upon us the things He wants us to embody in relation to servanthood.

Prayer.

The two portraits of servanthood in today's passage are really examples of qualities that Paul has already urged upon the Philippians in chapter 2. Let's first consider Timothy.

***Timothy: a portrait of humble servanthood.*** (Philippians 2:19-24) Timothy was probably a teenager when he came to Christ (see Acts 16). From things that Paul wrote to Timothy and about Timothy, we get the impression that he was somewhat sensitive and easily deflated. But we also know that he didn't let his youthfulness or his temperament slow him down. He accompanied Paul on his missionary journeys and used his gifts wherever God led him. Eventually he was martyred by a mob in Ephesus for opposing the city's idolatry.

Paul doesn't use the term humility when writing about Timothy, but his description of Timothy mirrors the qualities of humility he wrote about earlier in the chapter.

19 But I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you shortly, so that I also may be encouraged when I learn of your condition.

Paul wanted to be encouraged by a firsthand account of the Philippians' spiritual health. In verse 20 Paul explains why Timothy was the person he was sending to visit them and bring back a report.

20 For I have no one *else* of kindred spirit who will genuinely be concerned for your welfare.

Not everybody has the capacity to be genuinely concerned about people in another culture, another city. Many, many people - in Paul's day and ours - have the capacity to be concerned for the welfare of their own family and friends. But not many people share that same compassion for people far away from home in another culture. Timothy was the exception: just like Paul he was genuinely concerned for the Philippians' welfare.

In verse 21 Paul makes a very significant comment in light of what he said earlier in chapter 2:

21 For they [everyone besides Timothy] all seek after their own interests, not those of Christ Jesus.

This is a rather sobering evaluation of the believers around him (probably in Rome). His sense was that the vast majority of the believers he knew lacked the type of humility he had described earlier in Philippians 2. Back in verse 4 Paul challenged the Philippians:

4 do not *merely* look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.

That is the attitude of humility, the attitude of Christ. Paul is saying in verse 21 that the other Christians around him lacked such humility. They lacked this "others" focus. They may have been "good Christians" in many other senses; but they were basically self-centered. It is very significant that after Paul says, "they all seek after their own interests," he adds, "not those of Christ Jesus." Stating it positively, Paul is saying that ***to seek after the interests of others is to seek after the interests of Christ***. Jesus is the ultimate example of looking out for the interests of others. We are Christ-like when we have a genuine concern for others.

Paul appeals to the Philippians' own knowledge of Timothy in verse 22:

22 But you know of his proven worth that he served with me in the furtherance of the gospel like a child *serving* his father. 23 Therefore I hope to send him immediately, as soon as I see how things *go* with me; 24 and I trust in the Lord that I myself also shall be coming shortly.

Timothy had accompanied Paul when he was previously in Philippi. The Philippians had seen how valuable Timothy had been to Paul. He had proven his worth. Timothy had been like a son to Paul in sharing the gospel. Therefore, Paul says, he would send Timothy as soon as he could; hopefully Paul himself could follow shortly thereafter.

The bottom line is that Paul had multiplied himself through Timothy. Timothy had learned from Paul how to pour out his life as a drink offering (see Paul's description of himself in Acts 20:18-19). Timothy now had Paul's shepherd's heart. Paul could send Timothy to the Philippians knowing that through his humble servanthood God would address the needs of the Philippians.

We need "Timothys" in our day in the church. There exists a crying need for people who have the capacity to not merely look out for their own interests, but also the interests of others - ultimately the interests of Christ. Showing humble servanthood to one another is God's design for the body of Christ; He has made us interdependent in this way.

Think about your commitment to others ***within the body of Christ***. Ask yourself whether there are others in the church (outside of your immediate family) about whom you can say, "I am actively looking out for their interests. I pray for them; I make a point to encourage them; I look for practical ways to serve them." My encouragement is to identify a small group of such people - whether in your life group or someone you've met on a Sunday morning or someone on a ministry team - and intentionally show them humble servanthood.

God has blessed me with a number of individuals who show me this type of servanthood. Several people in my life regularly serve me with their prayers, words, and actions. It is a powerful encouragement. Show at least a few others the type of humble servanthood that you want them to show you. It's powerful.

Showing humble servanthood is also one of the ways we represent Christ to ***people outside the church***. In our neighborhoods, in the workplace, and in various organizations/teams, humility and servanthood are incredibly valuable. Patrick Lencioni's latest book is *The Ideal Team Player*. His core idea is that if you want to be a GREAT team member, you need three qualities (not one or two, all three). You need to be humble, hungry, and smart. Smart isn't book-knowledge smart; it's "people smart" - you really need to understand how your words, attitudes, and actions affect other people. Hungry means that you're willing to work hard to accomplish the goals of the team. You're not the person who does the bare minimum amount of work to keep your job; you're willing to help the whole team succeed. Humble means what we've been talking about today: you don't merely care about yourself; you genuinely care about the well-being of others.

Most of us belong to some type of team (or group): perhaps a team at work; you serve on a board of some type; etc. What would your teammates/coworkers say about you? Would they say, ". . . yeah, he pretty much looks out for himself. . . he's not really interested in anybody else . . ." Or would they say, ". . . I can't quite put my finger on it, but s/he obviously cares about the needs of others. . . it shows up in what they say and do. . ." Try to identify one specific context in which you can serve others in humility. It's very likely that your humble servanthood will be striking and will open up other opportunities to represent Christ.

In verses 25-30 Paul gives us another portrait of servanthood.

***Epaphroditus: a portrait of sacrificial servanthood.*** (Philippians 2:25-30) In verse 25 Paul uses five terms to describe Epaphroditus; these terms give us a pretty good picture of his character.

25 But I thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier, who is also your messenger and minister to my need;

Let's take them briefly one at a time:

- "My brother" was an affectionate term Paul used quite often. Since he and Epaphroditus had the same heavenly Father, Paul could call him "my brother."
- "[My] fellow worker" expresses that Epaphroditus was committed to the same work of the gospel that Paul was.
- "[My] fellow soldier" also expresses Epaphroditus' commitment to the gospel, especially his willingness to face opponents and suffer for Christ. In his second letter to Timothy Paul challenged him to "suffer hardship with me" and to fight as "a good soldier of Christ Jesus." Epaphroditus exemplified someone who was willing to suffer for the cause of Christ.

The last two terms give us some clues as to the identity of Epaphroditus.

- "Your messenger" refers to the fact that the Philippians themselves had originally sent Epaphroditus to Paul. The term used is normally translated "apostle"; Epaphroditus was their apostle to Paul.
- The fifth term expresses that Epaphroditus had been sent as a "minister to [Paul's] needs." The Philippian church showed extraordinary commitment to Paul; they prayed for him, they sent him money (though they themselves were poor), and they sent Epaphroditus to minister to him. We learn in chapter 4 (verse 18) that Epaphroditus had carried the Philippians' latest gift to Paul. Being in prison, Paul would have been greatly encouraged to have a likeminded brother like Epaphroditus at his side.

But the time had come to send Epaphroditus back to the Philippians. Beginning in verse 26 Paul explains why. Paul wrote, "I thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus. . ."

26 because he was longing for you all and was distressed because you had heard that he was sick. 27 For indeed he was sick to the point of death, but God had mercy on him, and not on him only but also on me, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow. 28 Therefore I have sent him all the more eagerly in order that when you see him again you may rejoice and I may be less concerned *about you*.

We don't know the details, but sometime after he had left Philippi to minister to Paul, Epaphroditus became so sick that he almost died. Eventually he recovered, but he was distressed thinking about how concerned the people back in Philippi would be when they heard of his sickness. God was merciful and restored Epaphroditus, but Paul thought it best to send him home and relieve the Philippians' concern.

Verses 29 and 30 describe how the Philippians should receive Epaphroditus:

29 Therefore receive him in the Lord with all joy, and hold men like him in high regard; 30 because he came close to death for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete what was deficient in your service to me.

Like Paul and like Jesus before him, Epaphroditus was willing to be obedient to the point of death if necessary. If his servanthood meant risking his life, Epaphroditus said, "So be it." It is interesting how Paul described Epaphroditus' ministry as "complet[ing] what was deficient in your service to me." The Philippians had an ongoing obligation to support the cause of Christ; they had a "deficiency" or debt that they owed Paul as an apostle of Christ Jesus. Paul viewed Epaphroditus' ministry as a fulfillment of that deficiency.

Because Epaphroditus so willingly fulfilled this ministry, Paul told the Philippians to receive him back "in the Lord with all joy," and to "hold men like him in high esteem." His ***sacrificial servanthood*** was to be valued and honored within their congregation.

How do we begin to engage in this type of sacrificial servanthood? We have plenty of examples in our midst of people who sacrifice tremendous amounts of time and energy for the good of others - both inside and outside of the church. I could give you a rather long list of people who exemplify sacrificial servanthood.

But perhaps you've never really considered that you have anything to offer others, especially sacrificially. Perhaps the place to begin is by understanding ***how God has made you*** and ***how He is remaking you*** into the image of Christ.

I had never heard of Gillian Lynne until I read the book *Whispers* by Mark Batterson. She was an accomplished ballet dancer and choreographer. She worked on productions such as *Cats* and *Phantom of the Opera*. What's especially interesting is how it all began.

When Gillian was eight years old, "teachers were concerned that she had a learning disorder because she couldn't sit still." She was so fidgety that her mother decided she needed professional help. I'll read Batterson's account of what happened at that doctor's appointment (*Whispers*, pp. 77-78)

Twenty minutes into the conversation the doctor asked Gillian's mother for a word in private. As they left the counseling room, he turned on the radio and told Mrs. Lynne to watch. Gillian immediately got up and started moving to the music. The discerning doctor said, "Mrs. Lynne, Gillian isn't sick. ***She's a dancer.*** Take her to dance school." And that's what Gillian's mother did.

"I can't tell you how wonderful it was," said Gillian. "We walked in this room and it was full of people like me. People who couldn't sit still. People who had to move to think." It was almost as if Gillian were reborn. And although eight decades have come and gone, the desire to dance is still the driving force of her life.

Once she understood that she was a dancer, she experienced great energy and freedom to pursue dancing with all her heart. I would say that something similar is true of us when it comes to sacrificial service. Once we understand how God has made us to serve, we will experience great energy and freedom to sacrifice for the good of others. It won't be easy and it won't necessarily be simple; sacrificial service is often hard and complex. But it is satisfying. There is great satisfaction in seeing God use you in the lives of others.

If you are a believer in Jesus, God has given you specific gifts; these are abilities that the Holy Spirit Himself will empower you to use. I know people who have the gift of mercy; when they sacrificially show mercy to others (through words, presence, touch, time, etc.) those people experience the mercy of God.

I would encourage you to begin serving sacrificially in the area(s) of your gifting. You don't need an official position to do this; I do as much teaching during the week in conversations as I do on Sunday mornings. If you aren't sure about your gifting, ask a couple people who know you well, "How do you see God using me in others' lives? What do you think I'm 'good at'?" Most of the time it's pretty obvious to other people how God has gifted you.

And pay attention to your life experiences, especially your experiences of pain. If God has refined and deepened your faith through painful experiences, you have something significant to share with others. If you've experienced significant loss (death of a loved one, divorce, career disappointments, debilitating illness or injury, etc.), you know what others who are experiencing loss need (and probably what they don't need). Your experience equips you to enter into the lives of others in sacrificial ways to help them experience God more fully. It's very, very likely that God wants to use you in the lives of people who are experiencing what you've experienced.

I'll close by saying that humble, sacrificial servanthood should be the norm in the body of Christ, not the rare exception. If we are truly disciples of Christ - followers/apprentices of Jesus - we have experienced His humble, sacrificial servanthood; in the deepest part of our being, we find joy in showing the same to others.