

TO LIVE IS CHRIST

A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF PHILIPPIANS

Christ Like Friends

“True friends are hard to find. They stick closer than family, and often know you better. They pray bigger things for you than you pray for yourself. They believe with you when your faith is weak. They make space for you when life falls apart, and they rejoice with you when all is well. Most importantly, true friends remind you in every encounter who and what is most important. The essence of Christian friendship is companionship forged in the fire of two convictions: 1) Jesus alone can satisfy the soul and 2) His kingdom alone is worth living for.” – Kelly Needham, DesiringGod.org

As we consider Christ-like friends, I want to remind you of words from **Proverbs 18:24**... *there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.* That Friend is Jesus! Even if all the world forsakes you, you have a Friend in Jesus. Jesus said in:

Read John 15:12-15 (ESV) ¹² “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. ¹³ Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. ¹⁴ You are my friends if you do what I command you. ¹⁵ No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you.

Our Great Commission from Christ is to bring people to Him by sharing the gospel. A biblical way to touch people for Christ is through friendship.

The only way to have a friend is to be one! – Ralph Waldo Emerson

Paul wrote: *Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus in **Philippians 2:5**.* Then, Paul moved on to speaking of two special friends who so happened to be with him at the time. They were wonderful Christ-like examples of the mind of Christ being put into action by what we might call ‘ordinary saints’ – not spectacular miracle workers. Paul had a purpose in using these two men as examples. He knew that his readers would probably be questioning, “How can I have the mind of Christ?” So, he provided some real-life examples. His Christ-like friends still serve as examples today. He began with Timothy.

Read Philippians 2:19-24 (ESV) ¹⁹ *I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, so that I too may be cheered by news of you. ²⁰ For I have no one like him, who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare. ²¹ For they all seek their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. ²² But you know Timothy’s proven worth, how as a son with a father he has served with me in the gospel. ²³ I hope therefore to send him just as soon as I see how it will go with me, ²⁴ and I trust in the Lord that shortly I myself will come also.*

I don't think we completely know a person until we know their family and that is how Paul knew Timothy so well. Paul wrote in a letter to Timothy.

Read 2 Timothy 1:5 (ESV) ⁵ *I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, dwells in you as well.*

Timothy's mother and grandmother were women of faith. Timothy's father was a Greek and apparently was not a believer but the women of the family chose to raise Timothy to know the Lord. Unlike Paul, Timothy had known about Jesus from childhood. I encourage you to look back to your own personal time of coming to know Jesus – whether you were young or old. I personally was so young when I invited Jesus into my heart, I cannot remember a time when the Holy Spirit hasn't been with me. Paul who had watched him grow knew Timothy's faith was real. It is a grand thing to look back to the day the Holy Spirit took up residence in our lives – it helps us *stir up the gift of God* that dwells within us.

Timothy had been proven before he was asked to serve. Church committees need to remember this when seeking leaders. Problems often arise when someone is selected to serve that has not been proven in the faith, instead they may be selected because of personality or prestige in the community. Timothy is a shining example of what a child raised in the faith can turn out to be. I am not saying that people who are trained from early childhood in the faith are the only ones who can serve. This just happened to be a trait that Timothy had. Parents and grandparents need to remember the most important thing to share with your children is faith in Christ Jesus - that faith will be a gift that will last. Also remember that children in the faith do not have to be blood relatives. Paul and Timothy did not share the same family blood line but they shared 'the blood of Jesus.'

By Paul's second missionary trip, Timothy joined Paul and Silas on their journey. His willingness to be circumcised as an adult is clearly a mark of his commitment. (**Acts 16:3**) The act of circumcision was not something that helped Timothy's salvation but it helped to avoid problems in the community. Timothy's mixed Greek/Jewish heritage could have created problems on their missionary journeys, because many of their audiences would be made up of Jews who were concerned about the strict keeping of this tradition. Timothy's unselfish submission to the rite of circumcision helped to avoid that potential problem.

My father used to say when I was growing up – he didn't have any friends – only acquaintances. He was not saying this to whine and complain about a lack of friends in his life. Instead this was his way of helping me understand that what most people desire from a friendship is what they can get out of that relationship. The Bible teaches that true friendship is based on a shared devotion to the Lord and a mutual concern for each other's best interests.

Paul said of Timothy in verses 20-21 – *I have no one like him, who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare. For they all seek their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ.* There were

probably hundreds of other believers in Rome who could have visited Philippi on Paul's behalf. Paul named 26 of them by name in **Romans 16**. And, still not one of them was available and willing to make the trip on Paul's behalf like Timothy was. That was why Paul appreciated Timothy so much and he was willing to "put it in writing." Sometimes we need "put it in writing" – our appreciation for others. Don't wait until after a person is dead and you are at the family hour of their funeral. Tell the person you appreciate them now!

Some think Timothy struggled with a naturally timid character and sensitivity because of Paul encouraging him not to be fearful in **2 Timothy 1:7 (ESV)** ⁷ *for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control*. However, this conclusion is not necessarily so. Notice how Paul spoke of Timothy to the Philippians in verse 22: *you know Timothy's proven worth*. Timothy did not end up with a spirit of fear – his life displayed the Spirit of Power and Love and Self-Control. Timothy sets the bar high when it comes to being a Christ-like friend to Paul.

They shared something that Christian friends who work for the Lord together always share, that is the passionate joy of seeing people respond to the Good News and the shared agonies of seeing the gospel rejected and distorted at times.

Then, Paul moved on to writing about Epaphroditus.

Read Philippians 2:25-30 (ESV) ²⁵ *I have thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier, and your messenger and minister to my need,* ²⁶ *for he has been longing for you all and has been distressed because you heard that he was ill.* ²⁷ *Indeed he was ill, near to death. But God had mercy on him, and not only on him but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow.* ²⁸ *I am the more eager to send him, therefore, that you may rejoice at seeing him again, and that I may be less anxious.* ²⁹ *So receive him in the Lord with all joy, and honor such men,* ³⁰ *for he nearly died for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete what was lacking in your service to me.*

The Bible does not tell us much about Epaphroditus. He is only mentioned in **Philippians**. Epaphroditus had delivered a gift to Paul from the church at Philippi while the apostle was under house arrest in Rome. During this time he was under guard, but Paul was permitted to receive guests and to teach freely. While he was with Paul, Epaphroditus became seriously ill. After his recovery, Paul sent him back to Philippi, urging the church there to receive him "with all joy". In biblical circles, there is always discussion concerning original manuscripts. Epaphroditus is the one who delivered the original manuscript of Paul's letter to its original recipients, the church in Philippi.

Epaphroditus was a well-balanced Christian. Paul called him *my brother, fellow worker and fellow soldier*. Balance is important in the Christian life. We can become so involved in church functions that we have no time for personal prayer or Bible study. On the other hand, we always need to make time for fellowship with others – because that is how we spread the gospel.

Epaphroditus was a burdened Christian. He was concerned about others. He would not have made the dangerous trip to Rome if he was not. And, then when he became ill he was concerned that the Philippians had heard that he was ill. Epaphroditus was "worried" that the Philippians were worrying about him!

Epaphroditus was a Christian who blessed others. What a tragedy it would be to go through life and not be a blessing to anyone! Paul shared with the Philippians how Epaphroditus was a blessing to Paul. He stood with him in his prison experience and did not permit even his own sickness to hinder his service. The name Epaphroditus is somewhat difficult to say. But the personality of Epaphroditus is easy to recognize. He was a blessing to everyone who came in contact with him. I envision him as being one of those personalities who never meets a stranger and is genuinely interested in everyone. I wrote in 2008, "I can see the Epaphroditus spirit in our own church members, Dan and Jean Hiser."

Epaphroditus's name is of pagan origin. It means "belonging to Aphrodite"—the name of the goddess is actually incorporated into the name Epaphroditus. Think on this: Such is the power of the gospel that a man is set free from dead paganism to serve the living God. When Epaphroditus received the gospel, he was "belonging to Jesus," and the idol had no more claim on him, regardless of his name. The new birth trumped the birth name.

Joseph Scriven had wealth, education, a devoted family, and a pleasant life in his native Ireland. Then unexpected tragedy entered. On the night before Joseph's scheduled wedding, his fiancée drowned. In his deep sorrow, Joseph realized that he could find the solace and support he needed only in his dearest friend, Jesus. Soon after the tragedy, he dramatically changed his lifestyle and left for Canada to devote all of his extra time to being a friend and helper to others. When his mother became ill, he sent her a poem he had written:

What a Friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and griefs to bear!
What a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer!
O what peace we often forfeit, O what needless pain we bear,
all because we do not carry everything to God in prayer!

Believer, even when you are feeling "friendless," you are not. You will always have a Friend in Jesus.

Proverbs 27:9 (ESV) ⁹ Oil and perfume make the heart glad, and the sweetness of a friend comes from his earnest counsel.

A British publication once offered a prize for the best definition of a friend. Among the thousands of answers received, the winning definition read: "A friend is the one who comes in when the whole world has gone out."