

LESSON 4

THREE MEN YOU HAVE NEVER HEARD OF

1 CORINTHIANS 16:15-18 · PHILIPPIANS 2:25-30 · 3 JOHN 5-8

Reading before class: 1 Corinthians 16:15-18, Philippians 2:25-30 and the whole of 3 John. It is short.

We have spent three weeks on the member who works. This week we turn the chair around and look at the people watching him.

1. Name a person in this congregation who does something useful that you have never once said anything to them about. Do not write the name. Write the job.

2. In your own words, what does it mean to encourage somebody? We will come back to this.

THE FIRST MAN · STEPHANAS

3. Read 1 Corinthians 16:15. Paul says two things about the household of Stephanas. Write both.

4. Look at the second one carefully. Who did the devoting? Did somebody appoint them, or did they appoint themselves?

5. Read 1 Corinthians 16:17. Stephanas came with two other men. Name them, and write what Paul says they supplied.

6. That phrase is worth sitting with. If those men supplied what was lacking on the Corinthians' part, what does that tell you about the Corinthians?

7. Read 1 Corinthians 16:18. Write down what these men did to Paul's spirit and to theirs, and then write the command Paul attaches in the second half of the verse.

THE SECOND MAN · EPAPHRODITUS

8. Read Philippians 2:25. Paul stacks five titles on this man. Pull all five out.

9. The first three describe him to Paul. The last two describe him to the Philippians. What is the difference between those two groups?

10. Read Philippians 2:26. Epaphroditus was sick to the point of death. What was he distressed about? Read it twice, because it is not what you would expect.

11. Read Philippians 2:27. Paul says God had mercy, and then he says on whom. Who is the second person named, and what does that tell you about Paul?

12. Read Philippians 2:29. Write the two commands Paul gives the church about this man.

13. Read Philippians 2:30. Paul gives the reason. What did Epaphroditus do with his own life, and what was he completing?

THE THIRD MAN · GAIUS

14. Read 3 John 5. What is Gaius commended for, and who especially is he doing it for?

15. Read 3 John 6. Something Gaius did get reported. Where was it reported, and by whom?

16. Read 3 John 7. Why were these travelers out on the road, and what were they refusing to take?

17. Read 3 John 8. John gives a command and then gives a result. Write both.

The command: _____

The result: _____

18. Look hard at that result. Gaius never went anywhere. How does a man who stays home end up a fellow worker with the truth?

PUT THE THREE COMMANDS SIDE BY SIDE _____

I told you last week these are three different commands. Let us line them up.

19. Write the command from each passage in the space beside it.

1 Corinthians 16:16, 18 _____

Philippians 2:29 _____

3 John 8 _____

20. Now say what each one costs the congregation. They are not the same price.

21. Which of the three is the hardest for a congregation like ours to actually do? Why or why not?

- 22.** Notice something none of the three commands says. Not one of them says "feel grateful." What do all three require instead?
-

LET'S SUMMARIZE HERE

- 1.** Three different apostolic letters, three different congregations, three different commands about workers.
- 2.** Submit to them and acknowledge them. Receive them with joy and hold them in high regard. Support them.
- 3.** Every one of those is a thing you DO, and every one of them happens where other people can see it.
- 4.** Therefore encouragement in the New Testament is not a warm feeling about a worker. It is an action taken toward one.

WHAT THE THREE HAVE IN COMMON

- 23.** All three men were doing work that somebody else benefited from. Go back through and write who benefited in each case.

Stephanas: _____

Epaphroditus: _____

Gaius: _____

- 24.** Not one of these three is a famous name. Most Christians could not tell you a thing about any of them. So why did the Holy Spirit put their names in the book?
-

- 25.** In your opinion, what happens over twenty years to a congregation that never obeys these three commands?
-

WORD STUDY · RISKING HIS LIFE (PHILIPPIANS 2:30)

Start with this. The word appears once in the whole New Testament. Once. Paul reached for a word here that he never uses again anywhere, and he spent it on Epaphroditus.

What it means: to expose oneself to danger, to venture. Liddell et al. gives "venture, expose one-self," Swanson gives "risk," and the sense is to expose something to a chance of loss or damage.

Notice the voice. The verb is in the middle, which is the form that turns the action back on the one doing it. He did not risk something. He risked himself.

Its root is the ordinary Greek word for throwing or casting, the same root that stands behind the word for a parable. Why it matters here: the verse is not telling you Epaphroditus worked hard. It tells you he came close to death, and that he put his own life in the way of losing it, and that what he was finishing was a service the Philippians could not deliver themselves.

Source: Logos, 4 Aug. 2026. Lemma παραβολεύομαι, one occurrence in the New Testament, single sense to risk, "to expose to a chance of loss or damage"; aorist middle participle at Philippians 2:30; root √βαλλω "throw; cast; put." Lexicons consulted: Liddell et al.; Swanson. Full entries in Works Cited.

And note this: your English Bible already says "risking his life" and "came close to death." You do not need one word of Greek to know what it cost him.

BUT SOMEONE MAY ASK...

"Doesn't all this praising of people just feed a man's pride?"

That is a fair worry and it is worth answering rather than brushing off.

First, notice who is doing the commanding. Paul is not asking for this on his own behalf and neither is John. Both of them are telling a congregation to honor somebody else. That is a very different thing from a man arranging his own applause.

Second, notice what is actually being honored. Read the three passages again and see what gets named: devotion to ministry, supplying what was lacking, refreshing a spirit, risking a life, faithfulness toward strangers. The work gets honored, not the personality.

Third, the danger runs the other way too, and harder. A congregation that never says anything for fear of feeding pride will lose its workers to the quiet failure we studied in Lesson 2. Paul was not afraid of this. He named men out loud, in letters that got read to the whole assembly.

So the honest answer is that the command stands and the caution is real. Honor the work, say it plainly, and do not build a man a pedestal he has to live on.

FOR YOUR LIFE

- 26.** Look back at your answer to question 2. Would you change your definition now? What changed?
-
- 27.** Go back to the job you wrote in question 1. Which of the three commands does that person most need from this congregation?
-
- 28.** Think about somebody who has quietly supplied what was lacking on your part. Have you ever told them so?
-
- 29.** In your opinion, is it easier for us to thank a person privately or to acknowledge them where others can hear it? Which one did Paul command?
-

THIS WEEK

30. Write the name of one worker in this congregation. Just for you.

31. Write what you will say to that person this week, and where you will say it. If the command you picked in question 27 was acknowledgment, say it in front of somebody else.

Bring this workbook back next week. That is the end of Part One and we start on the tongue.

NEXT WEEK. Lesson 5: A Bit, a Rudder and a Fire. This begins Part Two.

Read before class: James 3.

One thing to watch for: James does not give one picture of the tongue. He gives a string of them, one after another. Count how many you can find in James 3:1-12 before you get to class. Bring your number.