



PHILIPPIANS: SONS, SERVANTS AND SOLDIERS

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Scripture Reference: Philippians 2:19-30

Hi, I'm Kirsten. We're going to be reading scripture together today. If you have one nearby, please grab your Bible. We're going to be reading Philippians 2:19 through 30. Please stand in your home for the reading of God's word.

I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, so that I too may be cheered by news of you. For 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. But you know Timothy's proven worth, how as a son with a father he has served with me in the gospel. I hope therefore to send him just as soon as I see how it will go with me, and I trust in the Lord that shortly I myself will come to you.

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, for he has been longing for you and has been distressed because you heard that he was ill. 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. I am the more eager to send him, therefore, that you may rejoice at seeing him again, and that I may be less anxious. So receive him in the Lord with all joy, and honor such men, for he nearly died for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete what was lacking in your service to me.

This is the word of the Lord. You may be seated.

Hi, I'm Pastor Alex, and I'm going to ask you to join me in prayer before we get started in the word this morning.

Father, we humbly come to you this morning to hear from you. We need your wisdom and grace if we're to walk in truth and love. Renew our minds and align our hearts with yours this morning. In Jesus name. Amen.

I wonder how you answered the passing of the peace question this morning about your favorite biography. The truth is that people leave their mark on our lives. And the reason that's true is because we're all created in the image of God and therefore every human life is really weighty and important.

I was reading the Facebook post of a friend, Paul Filart. He was commenting on a friend and brother who had recently passed away, and he said it in his post, It's been a real honor and joy to call you my friend, Andre. A friend in the truest sense of the word consistently present, ever dependable and always intentional. Thank you for your example. I'll miss you, bro. See you again in heaven.

I believe what Paul's expressing here is something about the impact that another person's life can have on our own life. Andre made an impact on Paul's life that has changed him probably forever. What I'm talking about is the concept of legacy.

Peter Strople said about legacy that it's not leaving something for people like an inheritance. It's leaving something in people.

There are two pieces to the puzzle of legacy, there's content and there's change. The content of legacy is what is poured into our lives and change is the effect that legacy has on what eventually comes out of our lives.

The passage that we're going to be looking at this morning is going to give us a picture of what it can look like when Jesus' life is poured into us so that it changes what eventually comes out of us. Another way to put this is that we're formed by Jesus' legacy to live from Jesus' legacy.

Legacy you see by God's design is one of the more powerful ways that God brings about deep, personal renewal of the image of God in all of us. Living from Jesus' legacy, as Tim Mackie puts it, is a matter of seeing your own story as a lived expression of Jesus' story.

But to be honest, when we look closely at our life, we can all see inconsistencies, right? That was what James was getting to when he said, What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith, but does not have works. In other words, how the story of my life actually plays out, tells the truest narrative of what I really believe and what I actually value.

Now facing those kinds of discrepancies is often painful for us, but it's also critical for us. It's painful because it reminds us that we're still fighting against God's definition of what's good for our lives. And it's critical for us because the gospel creates the opportunity for us to confess our sins, to repent of our direction and to turn back and follow Jesus.

And the more this happens, the more my story becomes the lived expression of Jesus' story. And that's really good news.

Another important truth about Jesus' legacy is that it fights against this independent spirit in us that says, I can do this alone. I got it. I can handle this. But that's contrary to God's plan for all of our lives. God's plan is for us to engage in relationship with each other so that we can actually see and be affected by the experience of another human being, living in the footprints of Jesus.

I remember as a young Christian, I was really hungry to understand how was I going to practically live out the life of Jesus in my own life? And so what I started to do was consume Christian biographies. I read about Jim Elliot and Bruce Olson and Joni Eareckson and Hudson Taylor and Martin Luther and Corrie ten Boom and Brother Andrew and many, many more. And God used all of those men and women and their stories, whom I never met, to make a deposit in my life. And Jesus used those deposits to shape and change the course of my life. But biographies are not enough. I needed more. And so do you.

So God brought men and women into my life. People that I could actually sit down with and talk with and share a meal with and in rubbing elbows with those men and women, I have an even clearer picture of what it looked like for another human being to live as an expression of Jesus' story.

Earlier in this letter, Paul talked about the legacy of Christ in chapter 2, verses 5 through 8, where he said,

Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was born in -- although he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

The Father's plan was for Jesus to live a perfectly God glorifying life and then to die for all of us who can never live that kind of life. After his death and resurrection, he would send his Spirit to fill us with his power and grace so that we could begin to live our lives as an expression of the story of Jesus.

The story of Paul's life is that exact narrative of the way he intentionally lived his life from the legacy of Christ so that those who came after him would be drawn toward the Christ filled and formed life that he treasured so much.

As we look into these verses this morning, I want you to recognize a couple of things, that there's an upstream and a downstream effect that Jesus' legacy is designed to have on our life. The truth is we all live upstream from someone else, and we've all been impacted by someone who lives upstream from us. Jesus lived upstream from Paul. Paul lived upstream from Timothy and Epaphroditus. And they all lived upstream from us, and we all live upstream from someone

else. And because this is true, Paul asks us to pay careful attention to what our lives are actually sending downstream to those others.

Remember his caution earlier in verse three, where he said, Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.

What he's assuming here is that leaving a legacy is inevitable by God's design. Therefore, the most important question is not whether I'm making an impact on those who are living downstream from me, but how is my life changing things for the people who live downstream from me?

Some of you will remember a song that Harry Chapin wrote in the 1970s. It's called Cat's in The Cradle, it's kind of a famous song. It's a story about a dad living upstream from his son. And this dad's heart and attention and affection is captured by all the things that target our heart and it for attention and affection in this life. And after years of putting his son off, he begins to realize that his son, who is actually now a dad by the end of the song, has become just like him. The last couple of verses of the song go like this.

I've long since retired and my son's moved away. I called him up just the other day. I said, I'd like to see you, if you don't mind. He said, I'd love to dad if I could find the time. You see my new job's a hassle and the kids have the flu, but it's been sure nice talking to you, dad. It's sure nice talking to you. And as I hung up the phone, it occurred to me, he'd grown up just like me. My boy was just like me.

You see our lives are bigger than our own story for good or for evil. And the net effect of your life and legacy depends on the legacy you're living from today in your life. Paul knew that and paid attention to the fact that the way he was living had a profound effect on the people downstream from him like Timothy, Epaphroditus and all the saints in the church at Philippi.

And so he determined to live his life in the footprints of Jesus. So that those who were downstream from him would come to know and love and serve the Jesus that Paul knew and loved and served in his life. The passage that we're looking at this morning gives us a real life snapshot into how living from the legacy of Jesus can and did have a powerful effect on those living downstream from Paul in his life.

In verse 19, Paul says, I hope in the Lord to send Timothy to you soon so that I too may be cheered by news of you.

Let me give you a little bit of history of the relationship with Paul and Timothy. They first met on Paul's first missionary journey. It was the day after Paul had been stoned and left for dead in a city called Lystra. Then the next day, Paul stumbled wounded and bleeding to the next town down the road, and it was called Derby. Well, Derby was Timothy's hometown, and it's at least within the realm of possibility that it was Eunice, Timothy's mother, and Lois, Timothy's grandmother that actually helped bandage Paul's wounds in their house.

Then a few years went by and Paul came back on his second missionary journey through the town of Derby, and he recruited Timothy to do an internship with him on, as he went to the churches that he had planted previously. And it was during that internship that Paul first visited the city of Philippi.

And it was in Philippi that Timothy witnessed Paul and Silas preach the gospel to the crowds, get arrested by a mob, beaten to a pulp with rods and thrown into prison. How's that for a first year internship? How many of you are ready to sign up for that one?

And then for the next seven years, Timothy was Paul's constant traveling companion. He witnessed the sufferings and the miracles, the turmoil and the triumphs, brutality and the blessings, the injustice and the redemption as together, they brought the gospel every day into every city they entered. And the whole time Timothy was watching the living example of another human being, walking in the footprints of Jesus.

And as a result of that experience, Timothy grew more confident in the Lord. He was emboldened to speak the gospel so that a great personal expense to him, he began to walk step by step with Paul and the legacy of Jesus' life without shame and full courage from a heart of love, growing in wisdom and discernment in the fear of the Lord.

Now I want to say also a few things about a godly posture for us, all who live downstream from someone else. And that includes all of us. Living well downstream requires effort, it's not a passive process. It's like when some of you were researching a college that you wanted to attend, you look for programs and professors that would give you the kind of exposure and education that would help you in your life's work. Effort that living well downstream requires of us is that your looking carefully for certain character traits in the men and women who are living upstream from you.

In a recent address to MIT graduates, retired Navy Admiral William McRaven, who is the former Head of US Special Operations Command. He told those graduates that they, not superheroes, must be the ones to step up and save the world. Now, I don't know if Admiral McRaven is a Christian or not, but what he said reflects good biblical wisdom. There are no superheroes living upstream for us in God's kingdom here on the earth. You're not looking for perfection in someone. If you are, you won't find it.

There are simply men and women who are flawed and broken, but what sets them apart is that they are among those who are humble before the Lord, who repent quickly of sin. And whose desire in a growing way is to come closer to Jesus and become more like him. These are the kind of men and women you should hitch your wagon to. They possess the traits that already you should be praying for the Holy Spirit to create in you and to grow in your own life.

Speaking of Timothy, Paul says, I have no one like him who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare.

So here's the first character trait to look for in someone who lives upstream from you, that they are genuinely concerned about the interests of others. In his book, *Mere Christianity*, CS Lewis says, The thing that you would remember about a truly gospel humble person is how much they seem to be interested in us. This is how Jesus lived, right? In humility, he counted us and our needs as more significant than his own.

Paul goes on, in verse 22. He says, But you know, Timothy's proven worth, how has a son with a father he served with me in the gospel.

In other words, look for people who know and have had the experience of serving as a son with a father. Let me tell you, there's no way to hack this kind of relationship. There are no shortcuts to this kind of relationship. Discipleship takes time and patience and endurance because there's as much to be caught in this relationship as there is to be taught in this relationship.

But let me warn you that living in the posture of a son who serving with his father is going to surface in you all kinds of things that need to be redeemed, frankly, in your life.

I remember when I was serving in my first internship with Pastor Jim Barton. It was a couple months into it and one day he called me into his office and said, Alex got a really important job for you. And this is all happening while I was a student in a Bible college down in Portland. So I've got a really important job for you today. Uh, and I thought finally, you know, finally getting rid of these menial tasks, and he's going to ask me to teach the Bible. So that everybody will know how much I know about the Bible. And he leaned over his desk and he said to me, I want you to learn how to run that mimeograph machine so that you can print bulletins for us for next Sunday.

I was in indignant. Inside I was saying, Don't you understand what I have to offer?! Well, I can't see you through the camera but I hope you're laughing with me right now. I had an awful lot of growing to do. The truth is it's only by your patient endurance as a son serving with his father that God will produce in you over time a life worth following. Timothy served with Paul for years as a son with a father, and now Paul is presenting Timothy as a father to those in the church at Philippi.

The next five characteristics are in connection to one particular man, who was actually a member of the church of Philippi, his name was Epaphroditus. Paul says, I thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus my brother, fellow worker, fellow soldier, and your messenger and minister to my need.

Now remember, the church of Philippi owed its very existence to the apostle Paul. So when they heard that he was rotting in a prison down in Rome, they gathered together whatever they felt like would bring Paul comfort and they enlisted their most faithful man, Epaphroditus to travel to Rome, to deliver these provisions and to express to him their words of affection and encouragement to Paul while he was in prison.

The church at Philippi recognized that Epaphroditus was a man who was living from the legacy of Christ. Paul says that he's been like a brother, the next character trait. Paul recognized that God always sovereignly and wisely brings men and women into the stream of our lives during the years we travel in the story of God at strategic times and important moments, sometimes in the pitch of battle, sometimes in the wake of some kind of joyous celebration and he welds us together so that we're mutually fortified for the journey that's ahead.

Who are these band of brothers and sisters in your life? Whom by God's appointment have become more than flesh and blood brothers and sisters, who by God's grace are now inscribed on your heart forever. And more, where have you leapt into the story of some fellow traveler in God's story and become one of those brothers and sisters for someone else?

I believe that this is the intention behind our invitation to you here to participate in a DNA group at Doxa. Through that kind of connection your life can be joined together with other brothers and sisters to live out together the legacy of Christ.

Next, Paul mentions that Epaphroditus was a fellow worker. These are the people we unite with around a common task. I remember years ago, I was in a men's group for about 10 or 15 years, I think, and over the years because people move in and out and change jobs and different things happen. And, we had a small core group of people that were always the same through those years, but we were beginning -- because we had added members, we were beginning to feel a little bit disconnected than what we had felt in years past.

So a friend of mine says, you know what? I think this is what I think we need to do. We need to have a common task to labor in together for the gospel that will strengthen our bond with each other. So we put our hands together around a common task together and it drew our lives together. It was like glue for us. And being a fellow workers is more than, but not less than being a hard worker. Being a fellow worker means joining and making room for others to join with us because God never intended for you or I to make disciples alone.

Epaphroditus was also a fellow soldier. Soldiers are men and women who share some fundamentals in common. Soldiers have a common creed, truths that they believe and promise to guide their lives. They have a common commitment. They have each other's back and they're committed to leave no man behind. And they have a common enemy. Everybody is shooting in the same direction against the enemy who steals and kills and destroys.

Let me ask you, have you had the experience of linking your arm with Jesus and another human being so that you're mutually helped to resist what is evil and cling to what is good? Again, this is what your participation in a DNA group is intended to provide, fellow soldiers who are standing side by side with you and back to back with you.

Epaphroditus was also a messenger. Epaphroditus and Paul and Timothy all shared a common message. Their Anthem was the gospel. Their intention was that it would shape their lives and their partnership and their mission every day in every city that they visited.

And finally, Paul talks about how Epaphroditus had become a trusted minister to them. Epaphroditus for him, Paul's needs were his needs. Paul's troubles were his troubles. Paul's limitations were Epaphroditus' opportunities. And again, this is one of the blessings that a DNA group is designed to activate for you. DNAs are contexts where two or three other same gendered people get together, they meet regularly and in a way where you really get to know each other and your story, understand each other's spiritual, emotional, and physical needs and grow in your knowledge and discernment about how to most effectively touch those needs in each other.

My question for some of you is, who knows your needs? Have you let others come close enough to you in your life so that they can see how you need them? How would they answer that question about you?

For others, my question is, do you know the needs of those around your life? Have you come close enough to someone else so that you can see how God wants to use what he's already poured into your life, into the life of another for the sake of blessing them and encouraging their life?

Finally, Paul concludes with this verse, with this command, he says, Honor such men and women. Honor those men and women who are genuinely concerned about the interests of others, who are serving as a son with a father or a daughter with a mother, who are your brothers and sisters in the faith, who are fellow workers with you, who are fellow soldiers with you, who share a common message with you, who are those who have ministered to your needs. And Paul's command to us is to honor those who have lived upstream from you in a way that has encouraged your life.

In his letter to the Roman church, Paul said, Owe no one anything except the continuing debt of love. Well, these are the men and women to whom you owe a debt of love.

So I want to challenge you as I close, to honor them in your life by doing three things this week. First, write them an email or text them this week and remind them why you're grateful to God for their life and the impact that they've had on your life. Number two, take a minute or two in your DNA group, if you're a part of one this week, and tell a little bit of the story of how God used one of those people in your life for your faith. And finally, since you are formed by Jesus' legacy to live from Jesus' legacy, I want you to consider this morning who God may be calling you to jump into the stream ahead of them and grab their hand and allow the legacy of Jesus to pass through your life, to them for the glory of God.

Pray with me. Father, we're humbled and marvel at your plan to use our imperfect lives to model the legacy of Jesus for others who want to grow as disciples. Thank you for the men and women you've used in all of our lives. We offer ourselves to you as living sacrifices today by your grace to do all that you've asked of us for others. In Jesus name. Amen.