

Live It Out

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Philippians 2:25-30
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Well, I want to talk to you about some virtues that have disappeared from our world. Virtues like honor and valor, sacrifice and service, virtues that used to be promoted and championed and even displayed in our culture but in recent years have fallen away, maybe disappeared from the map. Sadly, it's not just out there in the world where that has happened, this disappearing of values and virtues, but it's often inside the church too, both secular and sacred spaces. And I think it's in part because we live in such a me focused world where everyone seems to be self-impressed and self-obsessed and things like social media encourage that, promote that.

And social media isn't inherently wrong, of course there's nothing wrong with having an Instagram account or Twitter account, but I think we would be silly if we didn't recognize that there's an implicit temptation to use social media to build a digital kingdom where it's all about us. Where you're the prince of every post, the star of every story, the spotlight always shines on your perfectly groomed smile. And so many social media accounts are just that. And so, in a world where it's all about me, what use do I have to serve anyone or sacrifice anything, because it's all about me? And so in that environment, virtue disappears. Thankfully, it hasn't completely gone extinct in our world. There are still remote outposts where honor rules, where integrity reigns. And I read about one of those this week.

So this week I read the book, Lone Survivor. Maybe you've heard of it, it was a movie, but it tells the story of Navy SEAL, Marcus Luttrell, and Operation Red Wing. So if you don't know, Navy SEALs, those are the Navy's elite special operations troops. In Operation Red Wing, that was meant to be a simple reconnaissance or observation mission up in the remote Hindu Kush mountains of Afghanistan.

But things went tragically sideways for Luttrell and the three other SEALs in his unit when they came under attack by a very aggressive, much larger Taliban force, tragically three of those SEALs in his team died And Luttrell barely survived, barely escaped. And he had the assistance of a local village of Pashtun tribesmen, and it was thanks to their sheltering him that he lived to tell the tale. And when I read that book, it struck me for a number of reasons. One, I actually wanted to be a Navy SEAL when I grew up. It was a dream and an ambition of mine. And so when I read that story, it connected me back to old desires and passions in my heart. But there's another reason, a more compelling reason why that story stuck out to me. Because Lone Survivor is a very real modern example of the values and the virtues that the Apostle Paul talks about in our text.

You could say it's something of the secular expression of the sacred substance, the sacred ideals that Paul puts on display in Ephesians 2. And just as in Lone Survivor, you meet a man who

lived out those ideals of honor, value, honor, and virtue and sacrifice and service. So in our text, you meet a man who lived them out. You meet a man who walked worthy of the gospel, a man who took seriously the high calling of the gospel. And so we're going to look at this man, a man by the name of Epaphroditus whose example is certainly meant to inspire you and it's meant to inspire you to similarly walk that narrow but high road of the gospel to live out the virtues that we don't really see in the world. But we definitely see exemplified in scripture.

But it's been a while since we've been a Philippian. So let me catch you up to speed. Let me give you a quick refresher. Paul wrote the book of Philippians to the church at Philippi. He wrote under house arrest in Rome, chained to a Roman guard, and so he wrote to the church because he wants one to update them on his circumstances, "I want you to know how I'm doing." But also, he wanted to motivate them to live worthy of the gospel. He wanted them to be unified to have joy. And so our passage halfway in the book, it flows out of that exhortation in Philippians 1:27 where he says, "Hey, let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel." In other words, walk worthy. And then he is going to show you what walking worthy looks like. Walking worthy looks like being unified. That's chapter 1:28-30.

It looks like mutual love and submission with other believers. That's 2:1-2. It looks like humility and sacrifice, 2:3-4. It looks like working out your salvation with fear and trembling, which is sanctification. That's chapter 2:12-13. And then lastly, it looks like doing everything without grumbling or disputing no matter how bad it gets. Chapter 2:14. But the Apostle Paul, he's been around long enough to know that that is a very lofty standard. That is a high calling and so the average Christian is going to look at that and say, hey, I'm not Jesus, he's divine. I can't match that standard. I'm also not you, an apostle, personally called by Jesus. So, I'm probably not going to be able to meet that standard. That is way out of my reach.

So, Paul knows that they're going to need some real-life examples of people who've done it, who have responded to the high call of the gospel and are living accordingly. And so he gives three examples in chapter 2:17-18. He says, look at my life as an example. But then they might say, yeah, but you're the Apostle Paul. He says, well, look at a man named Timothy. That's chapter 2:19-24. And then he says, let me give you one more to encourage you to know that it is possible to live out the high ideals of the gospel. And this third man, he's the man we're going to look at this afternoon, a man by the name of Epaphroditus who a compelling and powerful example is what it means to walk worthy of the gospel. So, let's look at this man and we'll start with point **#1) The Commendation**, point **#1) The Commendation**. And we see this commendation, this glowing report about Epaphroditus in verse 25. Look down with me at the text. "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." Well, that's the commendation. It's flowing with praise. So, let's seek to understand this because Paul's not writing this because the Philippians didn't know who he was. He was their messenger. He's from the church at Philippi. No, he's writing this, so they know what kind of noble Christian he is.

Start with his name, Epaphroditus, common Greek name. It comes from a word that means favored by Aphrodite. That was the Greek goddess of love. Over time, that name simply came to mean lovely or charming. And you never met a Christian as charming, as lovely in character as this Epaphroditus. See, he was so noble in fact that the Philippian church anointed him, appointed him rather, and said, hey, you be our emissary. We're going to send you to Rome, by the way, 800 miles just to get to Rome for Philippi. We're going to send you on this journey and you're going to be our ambassador. You're going to take our financial gift to Paul and then you're going to tend to his needs. You're going to care for him, and apparently, he was the right guy to send, and he made quite a splash on Paul, quite an impression because Paul's going to write in verse 25, rather, he's giving you five very positive titles designations for Epaphroditus.

Paul says, "Oh, I regard this man very highly." And he starts with this phrase, my brother, right? He's, my brother. In Greek, that word brother literally means from the same womb. And Paul's not saying, "Oh, we have the same mom. No, he's saying, "We were birthed by the same gospel. Born from above, we are one in Christ, united under the banner of Jesus. He's my brother in Christ." And then he says, "He's my fellow worker." And Paul will use that phrase, fellow worker, 12 times in the New Testament. Every single time it describes a man or a woman who faithfully co-labored with him for the sake of the gospel.

Now he gives that title to men like Timothy and Titus, Mark and Luke, Priscilla, and Aquila, that married couple among others. But he says, "Hey, Epaphroditus is one of that noble number because he has labored with me for the gospel. He is working hard for the sake of Jesus." And then he calls him a fellow soldier. He's not saying he's literally a soldier. No, but what he's saying is he is fighting the fight for Christ. And Paul, by the way, was chained to a Roman soldier. So no doubt that's probably in his mind as he writes, "Oh, he's my fellow soldier." But he has the idea that, "Epaphroditus and I, see, we serve the same commander in chief, and we are both struggling to complete the mission. And are we suffering to complete the mission? Yes, we are."

And so you should know that when he says fellow soldier, he's probably implying this man, Epaphroditus, is a battle tested veteran, spiritually speaking, he's got the spiritual scars and probably the physical ones to prove it. So he is a noble, noble man. And it's interesting how those three relationships are mirrored in the book, Lone Survivor. So, Marcus Luttrell went on Operation Red Wing with three other Navy SEALs. And in the book and in Navy SEAL culture, they constantly refer to each other as brother, right? Instead of using the name Danny or Axe, which are two of his teammates, they just say brother, right? Because SEALs are family even more than their actual blood family sometimes because they were born out of the same crucible of pain in Coronado, California, they've got a thing called BUD/S, Basic Underwater Demolition School. And that's where SEALs are born and there was immense physical hardship.

But when they make it through that, they have been forged into the true war, your brotherhood. And so, they very much identify as brothers, and they live for one another. And sadly, they often die for one another. But moreover, they're fellow workers because they labor on every mission

together to complete the mission, sweating together, exerting all their energy together exactly as they did that fateful day in the Hindu Kush mountains. And then there are of course fellow soldiers, they bleed together, they fight together. And that day in Afghanistan, they died together because that's what soldiers do to complete the mission if necessary.

And it's interesting because those three relational realities, which are true for Navy SEALs, they're patterned in scripture. And it's meant to be that for believers. See, the church is meant to reflect each of those realities. We are truly brothers and sisters in Christ if we're in Christ if we're saved. And incidentally, that reality enters into heaven. We are family in heaven. Even if our earthly family wasn't saved. In heaven, we're still brothers and sisters in Christ. And how much more ought we portray that on this earth, in this life? And we're meant to be fellow laborers. We're meant to work together for the gospel. We're meant to partner together to advance the interest of Jesus Christ, not career the interest of Jesus Christ.

And then he says, "You are fellow soldiers." And the idea isn't that we battle people, it's that we battle the forces of darkness like Ephesians 6:12 says. Our enemy is not the Mormons or the Muslims or the Jehovah's Witnesses. No, no, our enemies are spiritual, and those people are the mission field. So we take up our shield and our sword spiritually speaking, and then we suffer for the gospel, yes. And we fight to advance the gospel so that those captive by Satan may be freed and enter into gracious salvation.

And the question becomes, are we living out those relationships in our life? Are you living as a brother or sister in Christ? Are you living as a co-laborer who's actively laboring for the gospel? Are you living as a soldier? And soldiers, by the way, get wounded and some die. Are you counting costs in order to serve the commander in chief? Now, Paul's going to continue this commendation of Epaphroditus. He says, "He's your messenger," which simply means he was sent by you. And that word messenger is literally your apostle. But Paul's not saying, "Hey, he's on the same level as those of us who were chosen by Christ, one of the 12 or me personally called into Damascus Road." He's not saying, "Oh, we're both capital A Apostles." What he's saying is in a non-technical sense, he's saying he who is a sent one because that's what an apostle is.

"He was sent by you, church at Philippi. He was your representative to carry out the mission of caring for my needs." And that's what the last description is it not? This fifth commendation is, "He's a minister to my need." And that word minister is used to describe the Levites and the sacred service they did on behalf of Yahweh, the King of Israel, God. And so, Levites were the priest, and their work was truly sacred, right? It was a spiritual work. And then that same word in Hebrews 8:2 appears to speak of Jesus who is a minister in the holy places, and that's Epaphroditus.

He wasn't an actual minister. He wasn't a pastor of the church at Philippi. As far as we know, he was just a member, but he was engaged in sacred service, and he was committed to the cause of Jesus Christ and caring for his brother Paul in Rome. And so he is a picture of a guy living out the ideals of the gospel suffering and sacrificing because he knew Jesus Christ was worth it. And

I think it would be helpful for us to pause and ask the question, am I walking in a similar manner? Is my manner of life worthy of the gospel as his is? Am I living out the high ideals called for by the gospel of Jesus Christ?

You want to use a term from the passage, ask yourself this, am I a minister for Jesus? Not a paid minister, not a full-time pastor. That's not what he means. Am I laboring in the sacred service of Jesus so that Christ may be known so that people would be rescued from sin? Are you a minister? And if you're looking for an environment in which to minister, I submit to you Redeemer Bible Church. Somewhere around 1,800 to 2,000 people come on a weekend, every one of those is a precious soul. And every one of those has needs, and God has designed it that you are here to help meet those needs, to care for those needs. So, then it's a matter of are you doing that? Are you living that out? Are you serving here? There are so many ways to serve at this church. Are you sacrificing on behalf of your brothers and sisters in Christ?

And I know some of you are. And so we would simply say, "Thank you. Thank you for serving. Thank you for what you're doing.?" And like Paul says to the Thessalonians, "Excel still more." But if you're not, if you are on the sidelines and you're just looking at the game, you're a soldier who has not yet entered the battle, then Epaphroditus, his voice rises up from the text and says, "Get in battle, get engaged." But there's more here. There's more to this man, Epaphroditus. So we'll look at part 2) *The Context*, because here in verses 26 to 28, Paul's going to tell you, "I'm sending him back to you, Philippians," which might make you wonder if he's so great. I mean, you just gave him a really glowing report in verse 25. If he's so great, why are you sending him back to Philippi?

Wouldn't you rather keep that kind of guy with you? After all your under-house arrest and the Roman prison system did not provide food, medical attention, or clothing, so somebody else has to do that, which presumably Epaphroditus was. So if he's so great, why are you sending him back? After all, you called him a minister to my need, which means his mission is your need. Why not keep him? Well, Paul's going to explain that in verse 26, "For he has been longing for you all and has been distressed because you heard that he was ill." And the idea is some point, at some point on the journey, either to Rome the 800 miles or some point while he was serving in Rome, Epaphroditus got sick and not just he had the sniffles. No, he got really, really sick. So sick that someone thought it necessary to go back to Philippi and say, "Hey, your man, Epaphroditus, he is very, very sick, gravely sick."

So they heard that news and then they get super concerned because they love him, and then news of their concerns goes back to Rome and Epaphroditus hears that their concern. And so their concern initiates his concern. But his concern is because they're concerned, and it's this really interesting but amazing sort of swirling vortex of mutual love where each of them, the Philippians and Epaphroditus, love each other so much that the very thought of the other person experiencing problems causes them deep concern. And Paul gives you insight into his mind, the mind of Epaphroditus, because he says, "Hey, Philippians, this is what has been happening. He has been longing for you all." And that word longing, maybe you know the word yearning. We

don't really use it a ton in English, but it's a strong word. I'm yearning for something. I'm really deeply desiring something.

Same word that Paul uses in Philippians 1:8 to say, "I'm longing for you all with the affection of Christ." And it's the same word that Peter uses in 1 Peter 2:2 to say, "Hey..." Well, actually, he says, "Hey, Christians, here's how your attitude toward the word of God ought to be. You ought to long for it the way that a baby longs for milk." And if you've ever had children, you know that is an intense craving. And he says, "That is the same flavor for his deep aching love for you, Philippians." He's not concerned about his own condition. No, no. He is longing for you because he knows you are upset over his plight, but then he takes it further and he's not just longing. He also, he has been distressed because you heard that he was ill.

And that word distressed is similarly powerful like longing, and it means sort of an internal feeling of turmoil, of agony, of anguish. You get a sense for what the word means when you look at the only two other instances in the New Testament where it appears both of which are used of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane the night before his execution. Matthew 26, 37 and 38, it uses that word. Here's how it describes Jesus. "He was sorrowful and troubled even to death."

That is a flavor of the very, very powerful deep love that Epaphroditus had for the Philippians because he heard that they were distressed for him. Now, there's a parallel to that in Lone Survivor. See in the book when news that Operation Red Wing had gone terribly awry, when news broke, media outlets were saying, "Hey, Navy SEAL Marcus Luttrell was killed in action in Afghanistan." Well, of course his parents heard that, and they were in Texas, and that news just devastated them the way that you would expect it to. But see, it was confusing because the official word from the Navy was, "No, he's not dead. He's just missing an action." So they don't know, is he dead, is he not? But either way, were extraordinarily distraught. And his mother, of course, of all of them was just broken, right? Emotionally just broken, distressed. And so this carried on for days.

He didn't just like the mission didn't go wrong, and he survived for a day and then they picked him up in a helicopter the next day. No, it was 5, 6, 7 days where his family is waiting and like every four hours, the Navy calls and says, "No update, still missing an action." And so their emotions are on the hook, on the line, and it's so raw and such a challenging time for them. And so at one point it gets so bad for the mother, Marcus's Luttrell mother, that she almost just collapses in a broken state of grief. And one of the family friends, actually a Green Beret who helped train Luttrell for the SEALs, he sits her down and he says, "Listen, he's missing in action, he's not dead. All we know is he's missing. You got to pull it together. You got to cling to your hope. You got to trust that he's okay." Because that level of distress was destroying her.

And we read that, and we're not surprised that a mother feels that way about his son. And I bet you moms would feel that way if it was your boy in Afghanistan, and you heard that on Fox News. But the amazing thing is with Epaphroditus, he's not feeling that distress because it's his son who's in trouble. It's his wife, it's his daughter. No, it's his brothers and sisters in Christ that evokes that massively powerful feeling of distress in his heart. And again, it just gives you

insight into the nobility of this man because when he hears that a brother or sister in Christ is in distress, his heart is distressed for their distress. And you don't get to that point unless you deeply love, unless you feel very, very deeply for those people, which he did. And that's what it looks like to walk worthy of the gospel, to live out the ideals of the gospel. And his commitment to walk in this way, to live in this way, not only cost him emotionally but physically.

Look at verse 27. "Indeed he was ill." They heard that he was sick. They didn't know how sick. "Indeed he was ill near to death." And the idea is we might say this colloquially, he had one foot in the grave, he was right on that razor edge between entering the next world and staying in this one. But that wasn't the end of his story because Paul says in verse 27, "But God had mercy." That word mercy is so beautiful. What it describes is the inner feelings of pity and compassion that someone has when you look at another person who's in a bad condition, their plight is awful, and you see them and feelings of pity and compassion well up within you and you say, "I have to act to lessen their burden. I got to move to help you." That's mercy. And that is exactly what God did for Epaphroditus. The text said, "But God had mercy on him."

And isn't that the story of every single Christian? It's a story of the gospel. And if you are a Christian, it's your biography too. And your biography is written in Ephesians chapter two, where Paul says, "We were dead in trespasses and sins. We were by nature children of wrath even as the rest." And that's very bad news. But then verse four, Ephesians 2:4, "But God being rich in mercy because of the great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ. By grace, you have been saved." And as a believer this morning, aren't you glad that God had mercy on your soul because where would you be if He didn't?

See, we have received mercy as believers because Jesus lived a perfect life, and he died on the cross and bore the wrath of God in our place so that God might forgive us and credit us with the righteousness of Jesus. So, the mercy of the gospel leads to the treasure of our salvation. And I would be remiss if I didn't say, if I didn't address those in the room who've never tasted of this mercy. So you hear this and maybe you're very religious, but you know that you're actually still in the darkness. You know that your identity is a child of wrath because you're still living for you. And if that is you, then my plea is do not waste the moment to appropriate God's mercy. See, you're breathing so his mercy is still available.

And the call for this text is, the call from scripture, the cry you could say is, you must come to Jesus. You must repent. You must place your faith in him. You must submit to him, kneel to him, and then hold out empty hands and say, "Give me your mercy. I don't deserve it." And then the glorious God of the gospel says, "I will give you mercy." And He rescues sinners just like that, and we'll see what His mercy meant to Epaphroditus and Paul in verse 27. You see, God spared Epaphroditus his life, He healed him, He brought him back to full health, and then His mercy splashed on Paul too because he says, "God had mercy on him, and not only on him, but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow." And the idea there is lest wave after wave of grief come crashing upon me.

And you don't have wave after wave of grief come crashing upon you when somebody dies unless you really love them. Like Marcus Luttrell's mother hears that he's dead. So wave after wave of grief crushes her. But how often is it even within the church for us to hear about the death of a beloved saint? And for waves of grief to wash over us? Like it's easy to just read that text, "Oh, so-and-so passed away, I feel bad for their family. All right, what's my next email?" Right? And so what we see here is God's mercy, but we also see that Paul had such a rich love for Epaphroditus that to lose this treasured brother and co-laborer and soldier would've been devastating to him. And we see even more the exalted nature of God's mercy because God said, "I will spare you from that pain."

And so Paul can write in verse 28, really in view of all of that, "I am the more eager to send him, therefore that you may rejoice at seeing him again and that I may be less anxious." And I am the more eager means I'm going to send him back with all haste urgently, diligently, as quickly as possible. Which is strange because again, Epaphroditus is there in Rome to serve Paul, and Paul has real needs because he's under house arrest. So why would he send him back? Why wouldn't he just keep him? "Epaphroditus, they'll be fine without you, bro. Stay with me. I need your help more." None of us would've faulted Paul if he did that. But see, he says, "No, no, no, there's something more important than my comfort and wellbeing." Well, what is it? He tells you, "I'm the more eager to send him, therefore, that you may rejoice at seeing him again."

See what Paul is saying here is your joy is more important than my wellbeing. And even though you sent him on a mission to care for me, I'm going to send him on a mission back to restore your joy so that you know he's healthy again. And you say, "But yeah, Paul, that leaves you without help, without assistance, without aid, and you're still under house arrest." And he says, "I know that, but my needs are not more than your needs. You need the joy. I will suffer the loss gladly because you're more important." And what he's doing is living out, Philippians two, three, and four, he's living out the verses that say, "Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility, count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others."

In this example of Paul, it is really almost a silent reproof to us because it is really easy to put our needs first and to say, "Hey, listen, I know you're in trouble, but me too, and my trouble's more important, so you guys are just going to have to deal with it because what I'm facing is more important." But that's not what Paul does at all, right? He doesn't think of himself at all. He says, "No, your joy is more important." And that's hard to live out, right? Service, sacrifice, so hard to live out. In fact, I'll be real vulnerable with you. This last month, boy, God has been pounding me with just how selfish I am principally because exactly a month ago I got married. And so, I have one of these things and marriage is wonderful and my wife is great, but what is not great or wonderful is my heart. Because in marriage, what I'm finding is I wake up not as a wonderful saint, which you think I would.

You ought to, but you'd be so wrong because I wake up and I'm so selfish and I think, hey, whose needs are most important? Mine. So let me do what I need to do, what I want to do. Let

me get food to feed my hunger. Let me take this chair because I like it. And you know what? I wish you wouldn't interrupt with my schedule or really my preferences because I'm important. And why does she think she's important? I mean, I don't say that, but there's that battle in my heart. Even this morning, even in light of preaching this text. This morning, I'm wrestling with the fact that, and let's be clear, my wife is great, and she serves me and she's wonderful and it's great to have a wonderful godly wife. But what is not wonderful is how I can be so ungodly in my heart.

And even this morning, I'm wrestling with the fact that I am serving her, but I really want her to be serving me because I'm just so important. But that's baloney, right? And the message of the Bible is the example of Jesus and Paul and Timothy and Epaphroditus is you are not as important as their needs. So, die to yourself to exalt Jesus by loving them first. And then I read this text and say, "Boy, that's hard, especially within the context of marriage." But you don't have to be married to wrestle with that. And in fact, and I know those who are married know the struggle, but see, like the one guy who was married for 63 years yesterday, and he walked out, he said, hang in there, 63 years.

I'm like, get away. No, but see, I know that you understand that struggle and you've climbed a ladder of unselfish is way higher than I have. But the good news is God knows we're weak whether you're single or married. And so, he gives us Epaphroditus as an example to say, and he gives us Paul as an example to say, you too average Joe Christian can live out the high calling of the gospel. You don't have to be an apostle. You don't have to be a pastor. No, you can simply be a Christian and you can live this out. Because Epaphroditus was just a regular guy, but he was a noble Christian.

And then Paul's going to conclude this lesson in 29 and 30 by giving us two commands. So, point number three, part #3) *The Commands*. And this is how he's going to wrap up this inspiring example of Epaphroditus. Verse 29, he's going to tell the Philippians you need to receive him in a certain way. Verse 29, "Receive him in the Lord with all joy and honor such men." Two imperatives, two commands, receive and then this idea of honoring him. Receive means it basically has the idea of open your arms when he comes in, welcome him as a full brother in Christ. Don't you think that he couldn't hack it in the real world of ministry, so he had to run home back to mama and Philippi? Don't you think he got lazy or scared? No, no, no, no, no. He's a honorable guy. I'm sending him back.

He's not requesting to come home. I'm sending him for your sake, for your joy. So when he comes, I want you to receive him as the spiritual hero he is, because some of them might've been tempted to say, "Dude, you were supposed to be in Rome for months more. Why are you home? Why aren't you serving Paul?" He says, "Don't you be suspicious and don't you look down on him. Actually, you elevate him with your honor." And that's what that honor such means is you give him the highest degree of esteem and respect and honor, right? And there's a real-world example of that in Lone Survivor because Luttrell survives. He gets rescued in the end by

American troops. And so they take him back to the US. I mean, he had gunshot wounds, all kinds of spinal injuries.

He needed surgeries. So he's back in Texas, he's recovering, right? Well, one day he gets a phone call, doesn't know the number, answers anyways, who answers numbers? They don't know. I don't know. But he's glad that he did. He answered it. Guess who was calling? Former President George Bush, also a Texan. And Texans love Texans. And so President George Bush, former president calls and says, "Son, I just want you to know I'm glad you made it. You need anything ever, you call me." "Yes, sir." "You have my personal cell phone number. You call me." That's incredible. I'm never going to get a president calling me.

Why are you laughing? But that wasn't the extent of the honor. No, because actually later he gets an invitation to the White House, and then the son of Former President Bush, at the time it was George W. Bush, president, he says, "You're invited to the White House. You and I were going to sit in the Oval Office. You and I are going to chat, sit on these nice couches in this sacred space." And then he thanks him for his service. And he says, "You need anything, you just ask, son." And you read that, and you say, "I'm so glad he got the honor he deserved, because he laid his life down, very nearly died for the sake of his country. That is not an honor too high."

And then Paul tells you, "There's no honor too high for Epaphroditus." He laid his life down, not for country, but for Christ. He was willing to die for the sake of Jesus. That's what verse 30 says, "For he nearly died for the work of Christ." That phrase, he nearly died, is exactly mirrored in Philippians 2:8 same exact phrase Paul uses to describe Jesus. And he says about Jesus being found in human form, "He humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross." And the implication here is obvious because he's using the exact same language. He's saying, "Just as Christ laid it all down, so this man Epaphroditus followed in his footsteps." Now it cost Christ his life because we couldn't have salvation otherwise. 'But in God's mercy, it didn't cost Epaphroditus his life though he was willing.

And in fact, Paul says, "He risked his life, risking his life to complete what was lacking in your service for me," which isn't an insult like, "Oh, you didn't do enough." He's saying, "No, you live far away. So you sent him to do what you couldn't do in person." But risking his life is the key that I want you to look at there and risking his life. That phrase is one word in the Greek, and it's a gambler's term. It means to stake everything on the throw of the dice, roll the dice, bet it all.

And that's a picture of what Epaphroditus did. He laid his life down, willing to give his very life to serve Christ. And that's a magnificent act of valor, courageous sacrifice. And again, in that human realm, the non-spiritual realm, we see that everywhere in Lone Survivor, from the team leader of the SEALs, who while they're under a withering assault from AK-47s and rocket-propelled grenades, he climbs up on this rock open to enemy fire. So he might call in reinforcements to save his men. It cost him his life.

He died there on that rock. Or you could think of the Pashtun villagers who risked their lives and told the Taliban, "We will not let you take this soldier, attack us if you want." Or the village chieftain who traveled through these very steep mountains, some 30 miles just to get to the

nearest city where there's an American military outpost. So he could say, "We have your soldier. Come get him." Every one of them risked their lives and we find that appropriately so courageous, wonderful, remarkable sacrifice, but in a much greater way, we ought to read the story of Epaphroditus and say, "That's just staggering that he would do that for Christ, a much noble cause than freedom in Afghanistan." Know the propagation, the advancement of the gospel is the greatest cause, the glory of Jesus Christ. And it was that cause for which Epaphroditus was willing to die.

And so the text is meant to spin the tables and look at you and say, "What are you willing to sacrifice for the sake of Christ? Where are you willing to suffer and count the cost so that you might live out the noble ideals of the gospel? How are you walking in a manner worthy of the gospel?" Yes, in the world, virtues like honor and valor, sacrifice and service, they're almost non-existent, but they're meant to be alive and well in the church. They were alive and well in Epaphroditus, and they're meant to be alive and well in us. And we see them, like I said, in a sort of secular but noble way and the life of Marcus Luttrell and his SEALs. But you're supposed to see them in a nobler more impressive way and the life of the church. So the question for us is how am I going to live out the high calling of the gospel, both in this church and outside? Let's pray.

Father, thank you for understanding our weakness and giving us the example of a guy like Epaphroditus who was in a sense a normal Christian, but he lived extraordinarily because he was committed to the cause, and he exhibited and displayed sacrifice and service and immense courage. And Lord, may we be inspired by that example and by the much greater example of the Lord Jesus Christ, his perfect example. May that serve to stimulate us and to move us forward, propel us forward into a life of consistent service and sacrifice because it's in living that way that the gospel would be so powerfully revealed to the world as our behavior matches that of our savior. So would you please do a work in our hearts so that we would live out the noble ideals of the gospel and we would walk in a manner worthy? Please accomplish that for the sake of your son. Amen.