

Philippians 2:25–30 (NKJV)

25 Yet I considered it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother, fellow worker, and fellow soldier, but your messenger and the one who ministered to my need; **26** since he was longing for you all, and was distressed because you had heard that he was sick. **27** For indeed he was sick almost unto death; but God had mercy on him, and not only on him but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow. **28** Therefore I sent him the more eagerly, that when you see him again you may rejoice, and I may be less sorrowful. **29** Receive him therefore in the Lord with all gladness, and hold such men in esteem; **30** because for the work of Christ he came close to death, not regarding his life, to supply what was lacking in your service toward me.

Have you ever wished that you had gifts or skills that would make you a more useful member of the Kingdom? Suppose you were a Christian man and all you really knew how to do was **find your way to locations, carry things, and cook and maintain a house**? Would you think those were necessary skills of the kingdom? How about you young people. Our church does not have any single young people old enough for assignments like this. But think about it. What about us older people when we were 18 and unmarried. Did we see ourselves in a **prime spot** to be useful to the kingdom?

The wonderful thing about Epaphroditus is what scripture **does not tell us** about him. We don't see him join Paul's team. Some people think Epaphrus, who is actually mentioned in Paul's team is really Epaphroditus. But there is no evidence in scripture to support it.

Epaphroditus means "belonging to" or "favored by" Aphrodite, the Greek goddess of love. This god was also called Venus. The name was common and over time began to mean **loving** or **lovely**.

We do not see anywhere that Epaphroditus was a teacher or preacher. We do not see that he was an elder at his church. We know nothing of who he was **prior** to Paul's mention of him or **after** Paul's mention.

When we finish looking at his resume, we might think, "Hey, I am as qualified as he is." I am thankful that God has seen fit to put these stories in scripture. It is encouraging to **us**, no matter **what** his talents are.

Like I said, he was **probably qualified** and **trusted** to **safely carry money**. This would have required a track record of being faithful in other things, maybe much smaller than this task. He needs to find his way from Philippi to Paul's rental home in Rome, and to care for Paul's earthly needs while at Rome. Not exactly **unusual** abilities. But the one quality that Epaphroditus had that might be rare is

the **willingness** to **put his life at risk** and **discomfort** to travel from Philippi to Rome and back again. He was willing to put his life plans on hold while he served the needs of one of the Lord's ministers.

Now again, we have to remember that this trip back and forth was not like ours would be, where we drive or hop on a plane and get somewhere in the matter of hours. Just getting from one location to the other probably took 12 days of walking with a great deal of danger in between. So Epaphroditus's **willingness** was no small thing.

The big point here, though, is that the difference between **a lot of Christians** and a person like **Epaphroditus** is not giftedness or exceptional talent or even deep understanding of scripture. Sometimes it all comes down to **just one trait** that everyone could have if they wanted it. **Willingness.**

What are **you willing** to do in your life for the Lord? Or better yet, what are you **not willing** to do? Those questions are good to answer.

Now there is another consideration in the life of Epaphroditus. He was not just travelling this arduous journey to visit a guy living comfortably at his own home. No. Paul was under arrest for a serious crime. The law in Rome was subject to **sudden** and **brutal** turns. Caesar could, at any time, demand **Paul's death**. He might also call for the execution of all of Paul's associates if Caesar regarded Paul as an **enemy of the state**. So Epaphroditus shows more than a willingness to serve and a willingness to face **discomfort**. He also showed a willingness to **give up his life** in his service to the Kingdom.

Now Paul tells the Philippians why Paul feels the need to send Epaphroditus back to Philippi. He gives his reason in our text.

Let's look at what Paul says about Epaphroditus.

25 Yet I considered it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother, fellow worker, and fellow soldier, but your messenger and the one who ministered to my need;

So Paul calls Epaphroditus my brother, fellow worker and fellow soldier, your messenger and the one who ministered to my need.

The first three things refer to Paul's relationship with Epaphroditus. The last two have more to do with the Philippians relationship to him.

Notice that Paul does not call him **a** brother. He calls him **MY** brother. Paul wanted the Philippians to know just **how precious** Epaphroditus was to him and **how important** to Paul he was.

Every believer in Christ is our brother or sister in the faith. But those in our church are in our family. You are all my brothers and sisters, in that we share this

journey together. There is something intensely personal about that. And that is more of what Paul is conveying.

Next Epaphroditus was Paul's **fellow worker**. Paul used this term a lot. John used it once in 3rd John. It is always used to convey an **affectionate partnership**. Paul used it for workers he was deeply appreciative of. They were always **special people** to him. I have seen lots of times in the business world where thanks were given to members of a team for their accomplishments. Many times the backstory revealed a lot of **dislike** and discomfort with each other. But the **accomplishments** still had to be noted. This is not like that. Paul is fully endorsing both the **work** and **the person** of the worker.

Note too the mention of that 4 letter word again. **Work**. Maybe we should have mentioned this before about Epaphroditus. He was willing to face **discomfort**.

He was willing to face **danger**. And he was also willing to face **work**.

Again, sometimes that is all that it takes to be useful in the kingdom.

I think about the building of this church building. I don't think any of the people who showed up here nearly every Saturday would call themselves ultra talented at building buildings. But you all showed up with a willingness to **work**. And in the end, that made **all the difference**. Something that none of you could have accomplished **alone** you all accomplished **together**. You were **fellow workers**. Sometimes the only difference between important work in the Kingdom **getting done** and **not getting done** is a person's willingness to **work**.

Next Epaphroditus was Paul's **fellow soldier**. The word for fellow soldier is really a word that means **with-soldier**. This is a **comrade in arms**. It does not mean that this is another person who happens to be a soldier. This is a soldier **with** Paul. They were struggling **together** in the spiritual battle.

Then we move to the titles that refer to Epaphroditus's relationship with the Philippians.

Your messenger- The word chosen here was often used by the Greeks to describe a public official who was so dedicated to serving the people that he would do it at his own expense. Paul was highly praising Epaphroditus. While the Philippians sent Paul monetary gifts, it was **Epaphroditus** that was probably the greatest gift.

the one who ministered to my need-

It was quite a compliment to Paul to have been sent a person just to look after him, to live with him and take care of him. Have you ever had that happen to you? Maybe some time when you were sick or something like that? What a gift that is. Paul could not do the very important **things he had to do** unless someone

could help him with **the mundane**. I am guessing that when we reach that point in our efforts with Kingdom work, God will always send people to help. Now Paul moves on to the reason he feels the need to send Epaphroditus right away. Remember that he is sending Epaphroditus **right away**. Then he is sending Timothy **as soon** as he is sure he does not need him any more. Then Paul is coming **himself**.

26 since he was longing for you all, and was distressed because you had heard that he was sick. 27 For indeed he was sick almost unto death; but God had mercy on him, and not only on him but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow. 28 Therefore I sent him the more eagerly, that when you see him again you may rejoice, and I may be less sorrowful.

I wonder how the people who believe that God will heal every believer who asks deal with this passage? Paul was obviously concerned for this brother. He was not so sure the result would be good.

So Paul sent Epaphroditus back because Epaphroditus longed for his brothers and sisters. That is always a good thing. It is like when we have **not been able to meet** for a few weeks. Isn't it a joy to you to return? Do you not feel like something was missing in your life? That longing was a good thing. But that, by itself, probably would not have been an urgent enough reason to send Epaphroditus back.

The second reason is probably what rushed the return.

Epaphroditus was distressed because you had heard that he was sick.

Now, keep in mind that there was no mail back then. The Philippians heard that Epaphroditus was **very sick**, but there was no way to send a message that he had **recovered**. This distressed Epaphroditus. This word for **distressed** is deep anguish, anxiety or emotional turmoil. We have all felt this for someone we deeply care about when they experience pain. We have all felt it for children or loved ones who are very sick or in pain. We want to remove their pain if at all possible.

As I thought about this passage I wondered what the difference is between the **distress** that is **good** and that which is **bad**. I think it has to do with the focus.

Distress for another person often shows that we love them. We care deeply about their welfare. That is a very Christian trait.

The distress that is bad is fueled by a **distrust** of God. We do not trust that God will come through for us or for someone we love. That is a very **unbelieving** trait. How do we tell the difference? Both distresses feel the same. I think it means we need to think about **why** we feel the way we do. We trace it to its source to

determine if it is a **faithful quality** or an **unfaithful one**. Then we deal with it accordingly.

Here we see a very godly quality in Epaphroditus. He cares deeply about the state of his fellow believers.

Note that he was not distressed for **his own** circumstances. That was not the primary motivation for him wanting to get back to his people. He wanted to assure them that he was ok.

27 For indeed he was sick almost unto death; but God had mercy on him, and not only on him but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow.

Now why would God **do this**? Why would he have the Philippians do this wonderful thing of **sending Epaphroditus** just to have him get sick and be of no use to Paul? What was God thinking?

The answer? We don't know.

I am sure in Epaphroditus's travels he ran across diseases he had never experienced before. When I was travelling to Ireland I caught a bug, probably in the NYC airport that took me weeks to get rid of. That happens when you travel. But why did God not either **prevent it** or **heal it** right away? We are not told. And Paul makes nothing of it. Paul deals with it in such a way to show to us that He did not expect the **miraculous** at every turn. He did not need to figure everything out. He did not have God in box that limited him to live up to Paul's expectation. He simply dealt with whatever God chose to put in His life.

Epaphroditus got to the place where they thought that he might die. I am sure they were praying for him the whole time. Eventually God had mercy on all parties. He did not want Paul's ministry team to be burdened with that extra load of sorrow. Maybe that would have been more than they could bear at the time. We can see that **God's character** is displayed here. God displays **his mercy**. He intervenes and **keeps Epaphroditus alive** for everyone's sake. We can trust that God will intervene in our lives as well, when we need it. He is **that kind** of God. We cannot **tell Him** what to do. We cannot ask with the expectation that God will do something, unless we know that it is in **God's will**, unless He has told us in His word He will do that thing, or unless He has **supernaturally revealed to us** that He will do that thing. Otherwise we **ask** and we **trust** and we **watch**. Some would say that is not spiritual enough. Some would say that is not "faith". But it seemed good enough for Paul.

28 Therefore I sent him the more eagerly, that when you see him again you may rejoice, and I may be less sorrowful.

Now it is worthy of note that if Paul sent Epaphroditus, Paul would no longer **have him** to minister to Paul. This tells us again what kind of minister **Paul** was. He told the Philippians to **have the same mind as Christ**, and then he showed them in His ministry **what that was like**. Paul cared more **about relieving the anguish of the Philippian believers** than he did about **his own comfort**.

So the Philippians sorrow increased Paul's urgency to send back Epaphroditus. Paul did it because **their joy** was more important than **Paul's need**. So to cause the Philippians to rejoice had more benefit to Paul than the benefit that Epaphroditus could give to Paul. Knowing that the Philippians were relieved of their concern for Epaphroditus made Paul less concerned for the plight of the Philippians. So that was good for both Paul and the Philippians.

29 Receive him therefore in the Lord with all gladness, and hold such men in esteem;

The word for receive refers to **favorable and glad acceptance**. In context it would be hard to imagine anything else. They should **receive back** their own dearly loved Epaphroditus in the Lord, basically **into the fellowship** of people who are submitted to the Lord, with the understanding of **seeing all of this** from the Lord's perspective.

Paul tells them to be glad, to be happy. And then he tells them to hold such men in esteem. What does he mean, such men? I think it is the kind of man that is willing to risk **his comfort, his health, and his life** for the sake of being **of service** to other believers. People who prioritize the work of the Lord so highly that they are not content to stay put. They put themselves out there. They see **the work that is needed** and then they **go do the work**.

Based on what Paul said, is there reason to think they might receive him differently? We don't know for sure, but it would be easy to imagine. There may be those who have a simple view of ministry. They may think, if it was **of God**, everything will work out just peachy. All the parts will fall together to make the work done be highly effective. If a plan is of God, it will work out smoothly. And here is Epaphroditus who, as far as we can tell was not able to **do anything he planned to do**. He **failed** in his mission. And some might think he failed because God was not in it. They might think he failed because God was not pleased with him. Well Paul puts an immediate end to **that kind of thinking**. And note that he does not ascribe this failure to the enemy as well.

When we set out to do faithful work, our plans are not always God's plans. The results are ALWAYS in His hand. What he measures is faithfulness. And Paul is telling these people that Epaphroditus is one of the faithful ones. He is one of the

“such men”. So don’t allow the **circumstances** in this case to distract you to drawing the **wrong conclusion**. Epaphroditus did a **faithful job**. God just chose not to use him in the way he thought he would be used. And God never explained Himself. He had no need to. Paul had learned to trust the Lord’s wisdom a long time ago.

Do things sometimes not work out the way you think they would? Are there things that you think would be directly used to give God glory. But God chooses to do something completely different? We should learn from Paul about this. Things like that can sometimes be **disciplines by God** to get our attention and turn us around. But often they are **not disciplines**. They are simply what God wanted to do for His own reasons. Sometimes we will see the reasons in the rear view mirror. Sometimes we will not. But in it all we can trust that God loves us and God knows exactly what He is doing. Paul never shows that he knew why God chose to have this happen to Epaphroditus. We live with mysteries.

30 because for the work of Christ he came close to death, not regarding his life, to supply what was lacking in your service toward me.

This is why Epaphroditus should be held in high esteem.

It is not based on the outcome. It is based on the motivation to do the work. We should remember that as we work. To obey is better than sacrifice. To do the right thing for the right reason is far more important than that the thing we do produce **visible results**.

And what was Epaphroditus’s motivation.

He was committed to the **work of Christ**. A man like this could have easily been involved in making money. He could have been doing what everyone else was doing. But for some reason he thought being involved in the direct ministry of Paul, who was probably at least one of the greatest evangelist that ever lived, was worth **leaving everything else**.

Then in this noble process he nearly died.

Now the next phrase is probably the most interesting in the whole text. Not regarding his life. The word for not regarding means **“to throw aside”**. It means voluntarily risking one’s life for something. It was sometimes used for gambling. It is interesting to note that **Aphrodite** was also known as the **goddess of gambling**. When people threw their dice they would cry out to that god in hope of getting lucky. Remember that Aphrodite was part of Epaphroditus’s name. So this may have been a play on words regarding Epaphroditus.

Paul is saying here that Epaphroditus was willing to **gamble his life** for the sake of the gospel. This is the safest gamble in the world. We cannot lose. We may meet

an early death. But in the end, we have lost nothing of great value and gained immeasurable wealth in heaven.

Sometimes I think we are tempted to look down upon people who seem to live recklessly for the gospel. We need to be very very careful about that attitude. We may be dealing with people's lives who please the Lord much more consistently than we do. Even if their plans do not work out well. I think of our brother who tried to approach a tribe of natives on an island relatively recently. Wasn't it foolish to approach those people? Wasn't it reckless to disobey the laws of the land? Didn't he know he might be killed? Yes he did. But he was gambling in such a way that he would win no matter what the end result was. We should hold that man in high esteem if what he did was **done in faith**. That way of living is a lot more common in the New Testament than people who played it safe and focused most of their energies on improving their stay on planet earth.

to supply what was lacking in your service toward me.

Maybe this means that **Epaphroditus** was doing what a mere **monetary gift** could not accomplish. We don't really know what Paul had in mind here. Whatever the case, Epaphroditus was determined to meet Paul's needs, even though he did not get much of a chance to do so.

I think this morning we have seen an example worth following. And fortunately it is an example that **all of us** can probably relate to. There were **no exceptional skills**. There was no **long years in ministry**. It was simply a **normal person** like we are. And he used the time and energy that was available to him to accomplish what he believed to be the most important thing he could accomplish for the Kingdom. He was willing to spin the dice with his life. Was it dangerous to travel that far. Spin the dial. Might he get sick. Spin the dial. Might he die? Spin the dial. And no matter what, he would win.

Do we have that attitude toward God with our lives? Do we trust Him enough that we will, without regret, walk into dangerous situations if we know that is needed for the gospel's sake?

Also are we willing to accept the **work** that comes with all ministry? Will we show up for the job needing done? Will we dedicate ourselves to whatever work needs done in the building up of our church. I think in our case it is more often than not taking chances **with relationships**, contacting people and asking to get together. It means the Sunday school teachers **working** to prepare their lessons and to pour themselves into their student's lives. For the elders it means **devoting ourselves** to the benefit of those we serve. It means all kinds of service all over the place.

But we need to make no mistake. It will **be work**. And it will often be uncomfortable.

What can we do this week to be of better service to the Kingdom? Will we show up for work?