

## **Servants to Model Your Life After Sacrificial Service**

**Philippians 2:25-30**

<sup>25</sup> 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; <sup>26</sup> since he was longing for you all, and was distressed because you had heard that he was sick. <sup>27</sup> 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. <sup>28</sup> Therefore I sent him the more eagerly, that when you see him again you may rejoice, and I may be less sorrowful. <sup>29</sup> Receive him therefore in the Lord with all gladness, and hold such men in esteem; <sup>30</sup> 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.

### **Introduction:**

One Sunday morning, the pastor noticed a little boy named Samuel staring up at a large plaque that hung in the foyer of the church. The seven year old boy had been staring at the plaque for some time, so the pastor walked up beside him and said quietly, "Good morning Samuel." "Good morning pastor," Samuel replied still focused on the plaque, "Pastor what is this?" He asked. "Well Sam, these are all the people from our church who have died in the service over the years." The little boy swallowed hard and said, "Which one, the morning service or the evening?"

**John 12:25**

<sup>25</sup> He who loves his life will lose it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.

**Matt 10:39**

He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it.

**Matt 16:25**

For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.

**Matt 19:29**

And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My name's sake, shall receive a hundredfold, and inherit eternal life.

**Mark 8:35**

For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's will save it.

**Luke 9:23**

Then He said to *them* all, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.

**Luke 17:33**

Whoever seeks to save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life will preserve it.

**Acts 21:13**

Then Paul answered, "What do you mean by weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus."

**John Paton accepted an immense challenge.** While he was a student at a Bible college in London, God called him to go to the cannibal-infested New Hebrides islands in the South Pacific. Some of us might have said, "Lord, You've got the wrong guy! Are You sure my gifts are fit for that? And besides, I graduated--I can make it in the ministry. No sense in my being someone's lunch after all the effort I've put in. I know a Bible-college dropout who will never make it in the ministry. Send him there; they'll eat him and who will know? He'll go down in history as having died a hero!"

But John Paton didn't argue with God. A ship dropped him and his wife off and they rowed ashore to an island inhabited by cannibals whose language they did not speak. From the moment they set up a little hut on the beach, the Lord miraculously preserved them. Later, when the chief of the tribe in that area was converted to Christ, he asked John who the army was that surrounded his hut every night. God's holy angels had stood guard. After a short time, his wife gave birth to a baby and both she and the baby died in childbirth. He was forced to sleep on the graves to keep the cannibals from digging up the bodies and eating them. In spite of the great challenge, he decided to stay. The adversaries were many, but that's where God wanted him. (His exciting story is told by James Paton, his brother, in *John G. Paton: Missionary to the New Hebrides* [Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust], 1965 reprint.)

He stayed there alone, and he stayed there for 35 years. He says in his biography that at the end of those 35 years, I don't know of one native that hasn't made at least a profession of faith in Jesus Christ. He went there with all the great hopes. The only thing he ever loved really in the world was his wife and then the cherished baby. He had to sleep on their graves and all alone he stayed, but God used him because he was content to do God's will no matter what it cost him. And that's what it means to aim your life at His purposes.

It's hard for us in this society to get in touch with the model of sacrificial living, and so we have been looking at Paul and Timothy and now maybe the richest of all of them, Epaphroditus. And I say that because he is much like us. When you look at the model of Timothy, as we did last week, you say, "But he is a gifted man, eminently gifted to preach and teach. He is unique spiritually. He was called by God, set apart, spiritual leader, trained under the Apostle Paul, a great leader, a great teacher, a gifted man. I can't very well identify with that."

Two weeks ago we talked about our first spiritual model, Paul, and you say I can't identify with him at all. He was a statesman and an Apostle. Maybe the greatest Christian who ever lived. Give me somebody like me and maybe that's why the Spirit of God prompted the heart of the Apostle Paul to write this beautiful section about a man named Epaphroditus. He is not a statesman. He is not an Apostle. We have no indication that he was even an elder in the church at Philippi. There is nothing said to lead us to believe that his ministry was anything dramatic or dynamic, unforgettable, earthshaking. He, in a sense, is the hero of the

common man. And maybe in that sense his level of sacrificial service becomes much more instructive for us because he provides for us a pattern of life at the level with which most of us must face it.

He exemplifies the spirit of sacrifice for the sake of Christ that has no public kudos. He had nothing to gain, not preeminence as an Apostle, not as a great teacher, preacher, proclaimer of truth, not popularity like Timothy as one who had been trained under Paul and had had significance ministry throughout his life. There's nothing really incomparable about Epaphroditus as there is about Paul. There's nothing really preeminent about his giftedness as there is in the case of Timothy who was so uniquely gifted of God, a remarkable man in every way. This is just one of us. And in that sense his model and his example becomes all the more direct in its application. We could say there are few Pauls, there are some Timothys, there are many Epaphroditus. This is the people's model. Now what do we know about Epaphroditus. Well, directly we really don't know anything about him. We don't know anything about his background directly. We don't know anything about his parents. We don't know how long he had been a Christian. We don't know what his function was in the church. We really don't know anything except by implication in this passage and we'll try to construct the best we can somewhat of a profile of this very unique man.

Remember now, Paul is a prisoner, a two-year incarceration in a private house by the Roman government. The Romans have chained him to one of their soldiers, keeping him a prisoner in his own house. During the time he is imprisoned by Rome he still has some freedom for ministry. The Philippian church who loved him very deeply, the church which he founded, as recorded in Acts 16, when they became aware of his situation were greatly troubled by it and decided they wanted to help him. Realizing he could no

longer work to earn his living, support himself in his ministry, they wanted to send him some money. So the Philippians collected sacrificially from their people a gift of love and they sent it to Paul and it was taken by this man Epaphroditus.

Epaphroditus took the money to Paul, but there was more involved than that. The Philippian church instructed him not only to deliver the money but to stay and to become the servant of Paul in the matter of all of his personal needs. So Epaphroditus is sent with the money as the chosen delegate of the church and also he is to stay as the servant of Paul, serving all of his personal needs. Now that alone would tell us something about Epaphroditus.

Number one, the Philippian church would never have sent a man to work in close proximity with the Apostle Paul unless he was most eminently representative of the godliness of that congregation. We can assume that they wouldn't want to put anybody suspect very close to the Apostle Paul who may well have been the most discerning human being that ever lived and who could see through anyone. And so we can be fairly certain that Epaphroditus was a man of genuine spiritual virtue, a man of depth in terms of his love and devotion to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Secondly, we could also ascertain that he was a man with a heart of a servant. For him to go and to simply meet all the needs of the Apostle Paul would indicate to me that he saw himself in the role of coming alongside to serve. There's no indication that he was a significant preacher/teacher in the church, although he may well have been able to do that. It could well be ascertained that he was more likely a deacon than an elder and that his role was more the role of serving than the role of leading. But nonetheless we can for sure know that he must have had a servant's heart.

The Philippian congregation having chosen him as their ambassador, as it were, to Paul would never have chosen a man who wouldn't literally give his life away in service to someone else because to do so would betray both their love for Paul and Paul's trust in their judgment.

Thirdly, we can ascertain that not only was he a humble serving godly man, but he was a man of great courage because he knew exactly what he was walking into. There was no question in his mind how the Roman government felt about Paul. That was obvious for everyone to see. It was imminently possible that Paul could lose his life because he was, after all, a prisoner and there was consideration about whether or not he should continue to live since he was bringing the heresy of Christianity into the Roman world. And if in fact Paul's life was taken away, it would probably be a matter of course for them to at least consider taking the lives of those who served alongside of him. So he well knew the risk involved.

Another thing that might help you in understanding this man is that he has a very common name. The name Epaphroditus was a common name. In fact, the word Epaphroditus was a common word. It was a...it was a common noun, if you will...not only a proper noun. Not just a name but a common term and I'll tell you why. The name is drawn from the name of a Greek god. Have you heard the name Aphrodite? Have you heard that name? Aphrodite was the goddess of love. In Rome her name was Venus, goddess of love. Among the Greeks it was Aphrodite. She was the goddess of love and beauty. And this man is named, as it were, for Aphrodite. The Epaphroditus is simply a term that means "favorite of Aphrodite, favorite of Aphrodite."

This tells us that he came out of a pagan environment. Christians would never name a child like this. Of course, a first generation church isn't going to have any background in Christianity, so he came out of a pagan family. We don't know when he was converted. It's very likely his family worshiped among other deities, this goddess Aphrodite.

By the way, she was an extremely popular goddess and was sort of the goddess of good luck. As I'll tell you a little later. The name Epaphroditus eventually came to mean "lovely, loving, charming," and so forth. But originally meant "a favorite of Aphrodite." And that was a word in and of itself. I'll explain that later as well.

He has become, however, a key Christian in the church, a sacrificial man who has left his home, his employment, his ministry, his church, his friends, to go and serve the Apostle Paul. A very sacrificial man.

## **Five titles which Paul gives to 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;

**1. My brother-**The key is the word "my." Paul is viewing him in a very personal way. He is my brother. What does he mean by that? Well he means brother in the sense of spiritual birth. They



both have the common source of life, God the Father having given them life in Christ through the Spirit. They are brothers in Christ and so they share the common eternal life. But there's more to it than that. It is not only brother of common life, but it is brother of common love. And the term adelphos also carries the idea of camaraderie, friendship, affection, feelings. And so Paul is saying, first of all, I want you to know that Epaphroditus not only shares with me common life, but he is a brother loved. I have affection for him, he is my comrade, he is my friend.

**2. my fellow worker** -This word is used thirteen times in the New Testament, twelve times out of the thirteen by Paul and he uses it of people who worked alongside him in the ministry. You can look up its uses in Romans 16, there's one in **Philippians 4:3**, another one in **1 Thessalonians 3:2**. Paul titles people "fellow worker," who came alongside and worked with him in the extension of the gospel. So he says he not only in relation to my person is brother, but in relation to my task is fellow worker, coworker. The emphasis here is not on common life, but on common effort. He is commendable not only for his relational skills, he is commendable also for his laboring effort, for his diligence. Not just brothers in life and love, but workers together for Christ.

**3. Fellow-soldier**-outside of biblical record that word was used on some special occasion to honor a soldier, usually a common soldier was honored with that title. And the goal was to make the soldier equal to the commander-in-chief. In one case to make a warrior equal to a king. To say you are a fellow soldier, in the very heart of that Greek word is the word stratiotes(?) from which we get strategist, was to say that you ranked with those who are the strategic people in the forces, the strategists, the great leaders...a great term of honor. And Paul is pulling

Epaphroditus up, my fellow strategist, my fellow commander-in-chief, my fellow...as it were...leader in the matter of spiritual warfare. It indicates that there was conflict in the ministry of Epaphroditus. It indicates that while Paul was battling, so was he. And anyone who came alongside him in that environment certainly was battling. Epaphroditus was probably battling not only men but demons, not only the earthly enemy but the heavenly enemy, not only the fleshly but the spiritual dimension.

**4. Your Messenger** Your messenger is the word apostles from which we get the word apostle, which isn't a translation but literally a transliteration. He was your apostle.

Now somebody might say, "Does this mean he was like the Twelve? Or like Paul? Is he a real Apostle in that sense?" There are others who are so designated. I think of Romans chapter 16 I think it's verse 7, but was he equal to the Apostles, the eleven and then Matthias who replaced Judas and then Paul who also was an Apostle? Is this an official title?

Well it is official, in a sense, but let me help you to understand this. The Twelve Apostles are unique. The Twelve Apostles, and you must understand this distinction, are Apostles of the Lord Jesus Christ. Listen to **Galatians 1:1**, "Paul, an Apostle, not sent from men, nor through the agency of man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father." Now noted, there are some Apostles, only a few, eleven plus Matthias, plus Paul, only those men were Apostles selected by the Lord Jesus Christ Himself and sent. He does not say of Epaphroditus he is the Apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ, he says he is your apostle. And here's the simple distinction. The Apostles with the upper case letters were those sent by Christ. The apostles with the lower case letters were those sent by the church. He is not an Apostle of Christ, he is an

apostle of the church. He is not that uniquely called and dispatched and foundational Apostle chosen by Christ, he is that apostle sent from the church chosen by the church. And that's a very important distinction to make.

The first were Apostles of Christ. The second category apostles of the church. And he is such, sent by the church, not by Christ personally Himself.

**5. One who ministered to my need** —word for minister here needs our attention for a moment. I don't want to get too technical but I need to give you these foundational ideas. ***The word is leitourgon from which we get liturgy.*** And we've been noting that word in other studies and that word has to do with sacred priestly religious service from which we get the word liturgy today which is used in relationship to certain kinds of worship.

Now, he comes then as the liturgical priest, if you will. He comes as the ceremonial servant, to minister to Paul. It's a spiritual term, it's a religious term, it's a sacred term. There were in the early years around the time of Paul in the church Greek city states. And some of you have studied about them in your world history. Greek city states were very proud, they had their own armies, they even went to war with other city states. People became very enamored with and very patriotic regarding their own city states. And very often there were men who were so passionately committed to their own city state that at their own expense they would use their money and their time and their efforts to accomplish great civic duties and provide great civic benefits. They were seen as the benefactors of the public. And they became known as the leitourgoi, those who at great personal expense did what they did sacrificially to benefit the populous. And that then is a fitting term

for this man who at great personal expense, leaving his home and his family and his friends and his livelihood and whatever else, literally came and put his life on the line to benefit the Apostle Paul. So he is the servant of the Philippian church come to bring a message and he did sacred service on their behalf in the life of Paul as he was instructed to do.

The money which he brought in chapter 4 verse 18 is called an acceptable sacrifice. And so Paul picks up with that terminology. He was a priest doing sacred service and offering a sacrifice of money for the needs of Paul.

So he's quite a man, quite a remarkable man...unselfish, humble, sympathetic, compassionate, all of those things. He's a servant, he's courageous, he's godly. He built a strong bond with Paul. He worked fairly alongside of him and did his share and he was a great soldier fighting the enemy.

## I. His Selflessness

<sup>26</sup> since he was longing for you all, and was distressed because you had heard that he was sick.

longing —

**epipothéō: to long for**

**Original Word:** ἐπιπτοθέω

**Part of Speech:** Verb

**Transliteration:** epipothéō

**Phonetic Spelling:** (ep-ee-poth-eh'-o)

**Short Definition:** I long for, strain after, desire greatly

**Definition:** I long for, strain after, desire greatly, have affection for.

### **HELPS Word-studies**

**1971** *epipothéō* (from **1909** /*epí*, "on, fitting" intensifying *potheō*, "yearn for") – properly, to long for, especially as it is fitting (apt) – i.e. *builds on* (Gk *epi*, "upon") the objective.

[This root (*epipoth-*) means "yearn affectionately," having "a great affection for, to have a yearning love for," *L & N*, 1, 25.47), i.e. to "long for, strain after, desire greatly" (Souter).]

Distressed

### **adémoneó: to be distressed**

**Original Word:** ἀδημονέω

**Part of Speech:** Verb

**Transliteration:** adémoneó

**Phonetic Spelling:** (ad-ay-mon-eh'-o)

**Short Definition:** I am troubled, distressed

**Definition:** I feel fear, lack courage, am distressed, troubled.

From a derivative of *adeo* (to be sated to loathing); to be in distress (of mind) -- be full of heaviness, be very heavy.

## **Phil 2:3-4**

<sup>3</sup> *Let nothing be done* through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. <sup>4</sup> Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.

## **Romans 12:10**

<sup>10</sup> *Be kindly affectionate* to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another;

**Ephesians 4:1-2**

I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, <sup>2</sup> with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love,

**I Corinthians 10:24**

<sup>24</sup> Let no one seek his own, but each one the other's well-being.

**II. His Sickness**

<sup>27</sup> For indeed he was sick almost unto death; but God had mercy on him,

sick

**astheneó: to be weak, feeble**

**Original Word:** ἀσθενέω

**Part of Speech:** Verb

**Transliteration:** astheneó

**Phonetic Spelling:** (as-then-eh'-o)

**Short Definition:** I am weak, sick

**Definition:** I am weak (physically: then morally), I am sick.

**HELPS Word-studies**

**Cognate:** 770 *asthenéō* – to be ill, without strength; to languish. [See 772](#) (*asthenēs*).

**He had become sick** (770) (**astheneo [word study]** from **asthenes** [see study] = without strength, powerless from **a** = without + **sthenos** = strength, bodily vigor) means to be feeble (in any sense), to be diseased, impotent, sick, to lack strength, to be infirm, to be weak.

### III. His Significance

27b ...and not only on him but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow. <sup>28</sup> Therefore I sent him the more eagerly, that when you see him again you may rejoice, and I may be less sorrowful. <sup>29</sup> Receive him therefore in the Lord with all gladness, and hold such men in esteem;

### less sorrowful

**alupoteris: having less grief**

**Original Word:** ἄλυπος, ον

**Part of Speech:** Adjective

**Transliteration:** alupoteris

**Phonetic Spelling:** (al-oo-pot'-er-os)

**Short Definition:** free from pain, grief, trouble

**Definition:** free from pain (grief, trouble).

sorrowful

## hold — — Present Imperative

## Esteem — —

**entimos: valued, precious**

**Original Word:** ἔντιμος, ον

**Part of Speech:** Adjective

**Transliteration:** entimos

**Phonetic Spelling:** (en'-tee-mos)

**Short Definition:** precious, honored, honorable

**Definition:** (held precious, hence) precious, honored, honorable in rank.

### **HELPS Word-studies**

**1784** *éntimos* (an adjective, derived from **1722** /en "in," intensifying **5092** /*timé*, "attributed honor") – properly, hold *in* honor, in a *state* (condition) of *personal respect*.

## IV. His Sacrifice

<sup>30</sup> 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.

because for the work of Christ came close to death



**Phil 2:17**

<sup>17</sup> Yes, and if I am being poured out *as a drink offering* on the sacrifice and service of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all.

**Acts 20:22-24**

<sup>22</sup> And see, now I go bound in the spirit to Jerusalem, not knowing the things that will happen to me there, <sup>23</sup> except that the Holy Spirit testifies in every city, saying that chains and tribulations await me. <sup>24</sup> But none of these things move me; nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.

**Romans 16:3-5**

<sup>3</sup> Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, <sup>4</sup> who risked their own necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles.

**Rev 12:11**

<sup>11</sup> And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death.

**not regarding his life——parabouleuomai:  
risk, disregard**

**Original Word:** παραβουλεύομαι

**Part of Speech:** Verb

**Transliteration:** parabouleuomai

**Phonetic Spelling:** (par-ab-ool-yoo'-om-ahee)

**Short Definition:** I expose myself to danger, am reckless

**Definition:** I expose myself to danger; I am adventuresome, reckless. one who rashly exposes himself to dangers, to be venturesome, reckless (cf. Winers Grammar, 93 (88); Lob. ad Phryn., p. 67); recklessly to expose oneself to danger: with a dative of respect, τῇ ψυχῇ, as respects life; hence, to expose one's life boldly, jeopard life, hazard life,

**Parableuomai** was later used of merchants who for the sake of gain exposed themselves to death. The word was used of a fighter in the arena who exposed himself to the dangers of the arena. In the post-apostolic church there were societies of men and women who called themselves "**the paraboloni**" or "**the riskers or gamblers**". They risked their lives by ministering the sick and imprisoned and they saw to it if possible that martyrs and sometimes even their enemies would receive an honorable burial. In Carthage during the great plague of 252AD, Cyprian, the bishop, showed remarkable courage, taking on himself the care of the sick and urging of his flock to nurse them and bury those who died from the pestilence. Cyprian's conduct like a light in the darkness contrasted to the practice of the pagans who threw the corpses out of the plague-infested city and actually ran from them in terror! Such is the transforming effect of the gospel.

**Barclay** adds that **parableuomai** was

a gambler's word and means to stake everything on a turn of the dice. Paul is saying that for the sake of Jesus Christ Epaphroditus gambled his life.

Keith L. Brooks, a contemporary author of Christian books, tells a story in his *Illustrations for Preachers and Speakers* that is especially appropriate as we consider doing the Lord's work in the Lord's way ([Grand Rapids: Zondervan Pub. House, 1946], pp. 75-76). Northwestern University, located in Evanston, Illinois, once had a volunteer lifesaving crew to rescue people on ships that were in distress on Lake Michigan. One time the *Lady Elgin*, a passenger ship, foundered offshore. One member of the crew who participated in the rescue attempt was a young student at Garrett Biblical Institute. He was preparing for a lifetime of missionary service. His name was Edward W. Spencer. He saw a woman clinging to some wreckage far out in the breakers. So he dove in the water and swam out to bring her safely to shore. Seeing more victims in the water, Spencer swam out again and again until finally he had rescued seventeen people by himself. Then, collapsing in a delirium of exhaustion, he cried out, "Did I do my best? Did I do my best?" When his brother informed him of how many lives he had saved, Spencer replied, "If only I could have saved one more!" Did he do his best? I'd say he did!