

Ministry Glasses

Passionate Servanthood Part 6
Philippians 2:25-30 6-26-2016

Summary: In his description of Epaphroditus in verse 25, Paul gives us glasses that show us the camaraderie of ministry (it makes us a brotherhood), the cooperation of ministry (we are parts of the one body doing one work, and so the importance of your ministry is measured not by which part of the body you are, but by how faithful you are in that role), courage needed in ministry (we are soldiers fighting in a war), and the commissioning of ministry (when your calling is authorized by the church, you can be confident that you are commissioned by God to do that work). And the motive for ministry is love.

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Philippians 2:25 But I think it is necessary to send back to you Epaphroditus, my brother, fellow worker and fellow soldier, who is also your messenger, whom you sent to take care of my needs (lit: and your apostle and minister of my needs). 26 For he longs for all of you and is distressed because you heard he was ill. 27 Indeed he was ill, and almost died. But God had mercy on him, and not on him only but also on me, to spare me sorrow upon sorrow. 28 Therefore I am all the more eager to send him, so that when you see him again you may be glad and I may have less anxiety. 29 Welcome him in the Lord with great joy, and honor men like him, 30 because he almost died for the work of Christ, risking his life to make up for the help you could not give me.

Introduction

In the Lord

We are studying the final paragraph in Philippians 2 where Paul is explaining his plans about sending Timothy and Epaphroditus to Philippi.

Hendrickson: “Paul, the joyful servant of Jesus Christ, the optimistic prisoner, the humble cross-bearer, is also the thoughtful administrator. Even from his prison in Rome he manages in a masterly fashion the spiritual terrain entrusted to his care, so that we marvel at his practical wisdom, gracious consideration of the needs and feelings of others, and delightful unselfishness.”¹

¹ William Hendricksen, NTC, Philippians.

Epaphroditus really wants to go back, but he doesn't make that decision on his own. He waits for Paul to give him the green light. He was a man under authority. And so was Paul. Paul was under Christ's authority. One thing we didn't get to in the section on Timothy was when Paul twice says **in the Lord when** he talks about his plans.

19 I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon,

24 I am confident in the Lord that I myself will come soon.

When Paul says that phrase, **in the Lord**, he's not just throwing that in to sound religious. He is making a point to affirm that his hopes and plans are all subject to the Lordship of Christ – his sovereign will. If you read Paul's writings you will realize very quickly that this was how he lived his life. Every plan he ever made, every hope he ever carried in his heart, every desire was contingent on if it was in alignment with God's will. He didn't just make plans and then pray for God to bless them. His attitude was the same as that of Jesus in the garden – not my will, but your will be done. He cared supremely about God's will, and he never wanted anything other than God's will.

But let me offer a caution along that line. Sometimes people make the mistake of thinking that submissiveness to God's sovereign will means being resigned and passive and not really having any will of your own. So if you asked them, "What do you want to happen?" they say, "Oh, I don't care. Whatever God wants to do is fine with me." If you asked Paul what he wanted, he would never give an answer. He would definitely agree with the second part – "whatever God wants to do is fine with me," but he would never say that first part (Oh, I don't care - it doesn't matter to me). Paul was totally submissive to God's will, but he understood that when God wills something, very often the way God wills to get it done is by burdening someone's heart with that thing until that person becomes so consumed with it that he or she prays for it, cries out to God for it, and runs, and labors, and works hard for it, mobilizes some people to help get it done, prays some more, bangs on the door of heaven, and pours himself or herself out getting it done. So the phrase, "It doesn't really matter to me," and the phrase, "Whatever God wants to do is fine with me" - those two phrases don't go together. Total submissiveness to God's will is a wonderful thing. Apathy, indifference, lack of passion – those are not good things. Paul wanted to visit Philippi, and you can bet, unless God totally slammed the doors on it, he was going to find a way to visit Philippi. This is how God's will in ministry works.

Selfless Ministry

Paul has had a lot to say in this epistle about hard work in ministry – we have seen it several times already. And there is a reason for that. It is related to one of the main themes of the book. Paul wrote this book to help the Philippians understand how to live with selfless humility and unity. But you may have noticed that I titled this series in the second half of the chapter, *Passionate Servanthood*. The past five sermons have been all about serving in ministry. So which is it? Are we talking about selflessness and putting others interests ahead of your own? Or are we talking about serving in ministry? Or is it that the first half of the chapter is about selflessness and unity and putting others' interests ahead of your own, and then in the second half of the chapter Paul shifts gears to another topic and begins teaching us about serving in ministry? The answer is this: putting others first, and serving in ministry are not parallel themes. They are the same theme, because the most fundamental way to show selflessness and putting others' spiritual interests ahead of your own temporal interests is to serve passionately in ministry. Jesus put our interests ahead of his own, and he became what? *A servant*. The way he put others' interests ahead of his own was through serving. Timothy put the Philippians interests ahead of his own – how? By serving in ministry. Epaphroditus – same thing. Paul – same thing. If you want to serve someone else's best interests, there is no greater way to do that than to use your spiritual gift in the church serving in ministry, because nothing will do that person more good than for grace to gush forth from a healthy church. So it makes perfect sense that in a section on putting others' needs ahead of your own, Paul would talk about laboring hard in ministry.

Ministry Costs You Your Life

“But I enjoy ministry. How is doing ministry putting others’ interests ahead of my own?” Serving passionately in ministry is putting others’ spiritual interests ahead of your own temporal interests because serving passionately in ministry will cost you your life. Look at verse 30.

30 because he almost died for the work of Christ

Literally it says, **He approached to the point of death for the sake of the work of Christ.** The phrase **to the point of death** appears only one other time in the whole Bible – and it is in this same chapter.

8 - being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death

Paul is saying that Epaphroditus did the same thing Jesus did. Now, in Jesus’ case he actually died. Epaphroditus was willing to die. So the point is not so much whether you die or not, but rather whether you lay down your life completely. You can sacrifice your life in two ways. You can do it by dying for Christ or you can do it by living for Christ. Either way, you are giving up your life for him. Instead of doing what you want and serving your own temporal interests, you use your life to serve Christ’s interests. And when you do that, you are giving up your life for the work of Christ whether you live or die. And if you do that to serve the spiritual interests of others, you are putting their interests ahead of your own. That’s the connection between serving in ministry and putting others first in selfless humility.

The Glasses

I pointed out last week that where everyone else just saw a guy transporting a bag from point A to point B, Paul saw a kingdom VIP whom we are commanded to hold in high honor and strive to emulate. And in verse 25, Paul gives us a pair of glasses that we can put on to see what he sees. Our natural way of looking at ministry is blurred and distorted, but with these glasses we’ll be able to look at it the way it really is, which is essential for us to have the kind of motivation we are going to need to carry out what God has called us to carry out.

In this one verse (Php.2:25) Paul uses five different words to describe Epaphroditus’ ministry: brother, worker, soldier, messenger, and minister. Each one of those will clarify our vision so we can see what ministry really is. Let’s take a look at each one of those.

The Camaraderie of Ministry

The first one is **my brother**. That one points to the camaraderie of ministry. Every Christian was Paul’s brother or sister in Christ, but I think Paul is talking about something more than that. He is not just saying that Epaphroditus was a believer. He is saying something about their ministry relationship. They had a camaraderie and a bond that can only come from serving together in ministry. When two people serve together in ways that are costly and dangerous in pursuit of a truly great cause, it creates a strong brotherhood.

And when that happens, it creates a bond. God designed us with a built-in desire for fraternity. That’s why colleges have fraternities and sororities. It’s kind of a pretend brotherhood. Nothing of any real substance actually binds them together; they just sort of pretend they are family. But when you lay your life down along with someone else for a great cause – that creates a brotherhood that is more powerful even than blood brothers. Especially when it starts getting really rough, or you face some major opposition, and you hang in there and both make it through to the other side together. And now you have someone who understands what you’ve gone through in ways no one else can because they were there with you. Look at ministry through those glasses and you’ll be more drawn to it because you’ll appreciate the camaraderie and brotherhood that comes from ministry.

The Cooperation of Ministry

The second description is **fellow worker**. Fellow-workers are people who are doing the same work. They are joining forces in the same work to accomplish a task. So we can call this one the cooperation of ministry.

Epaphroditus wasn't the type to just say, "I'll pray for you," and then gets on with his life. It is nice when people are willing to pray for you; it's really nice when people pray for you and then they actually help you instead of just standing there watching on the sidelines. Someone said the church is like a football game – 22 men desperately in need of rest being watched by thousands who are desperately in need of exercise. Thankfully the ratio isn't quite that bad, but it sure is nice when one of the people who is desperately in need of rest gets a little help from someone in the stands.

That is what Epaphroditus did for Paul. And it is significant that Paul would use that word to describe Epaphroditus, because most people would not think of Paul and Epaphroditus as doing the same work. Paul was an apostle of Christ who was preaching and teaching and writing and church-planting; and Epaphroditus was an errand boy. Most people would look at that and would not see two co-workers. But that's because of our distorted perspective. Paul is giving us glasses to see that support roles are every bit as important as front-line, center stage roles.

But how can that be? How can it be true that the work of an errand boy could be equal with the work of an apostle? Because when someone does something great, the credit doesn't go to his individual body parts; it goes to the person. When people talk about the MVP of the NBA finals, they don't talk about LeBron James' circulatory system or his rib cage – all the accolades go to the person. The church is the body of Christ. Jesus Christ is doing great things through his body. And each one of us is a body part. And so when great things happen, if Paul is the mouth and Epaphroditus is the nervous system, neither one of them is great in and of himself. The greatest mouth in the world, if you disconnect it from the body and just set it on a table, is worthless. What is great is what the person (Jesus Christ) is accomplishing through his whole body. And the greatness of a particular body part is measured only by how well it functions in its particular role.

So when we think of preaching and teaching being a primary role, and running errands as more of a support role, that's not quite accurate. Both the preaching and the errands are support roles. Every ministry is a support role to the work of the body as a whole.

In Acts 11 Paul played the role of an errand boy. He did the exact same thing Epaphroditus is doing – spent months of his life transporting a financial gift from the churches in Macedonia to some brothers in need in another place. Whatever it takes to advance the work of the gospel.

Paul Needed the Body

I think it's very instructive to us to see how dependent Paul was on the rest of the body. We can slip into thinking about Paul as some kind of lone ranger out there planting church on the mission field – sometimes with a partner, sometimes on his own, but not really deeply connected with relationships in the church. Nothing could be further from the truth. When you see how much affection he had for his dear friends in the various churches you see that his life was deeply enmeshed with the saints. I just think of his letter to the Romans. In one chapter he sends warm greetings to more than 30 different people, mentioning them by name and something specific about his relationship with each one of them. He had over 30 close friends in the church in Rome and he'd never even been to Rome at that point! So Paul needed the body – especially people with the gift of helps or serving.

Helps

I hope this is an encouragement to those of you who have that gift. Those have always struck me as interesting gifts. When you think of someone having the gift of helps, you think, "Helping with what? With anything?" How can someone be gifted at helping with anything? I could help you if you are working on preparing a sermon, but if you need help preparing a meal, I'm definitely not your guy. You'd

be better off to take a bunch of random ingredients and throw them in a bucket and shake it up and hope it evolves into something. How can someone have the gift of helps in general? Does that mean he's gifted in every single area?" No. You don't have to be good at everything in order to have the gift of helps; you just have to be helpful. Maybe you know nothing about fixing cars, but you can hand someone a wrench or run an errand to the parts store, or hold the flashlight or whatever. There are some people who just seem to be able to find a way to be helpful. And they like to help. It feels good to them to be able to really help someone out. They like being available to fill in the gaps.

People like that are such an indispensable treasure to the church, and yet, very often people with the gift of helps don't feel like they have any gift because they don't have passion for one specific area. But God made them that way on purpose because he wants them to be available to help wherever needed. When you have a guy like me, who is all wrapped up in teaching and preaching, I'm typically not available to help with anything else. But God wants these people to be available whenever they are needed, and so he just makes them generalists. They tend to have a variety of skills and abilities, and they aren't totally tied up in any one area. And that is what makes them so valuable, because no ministry, no matter how passionate and driven the leader is, can accomplish anything without these people. People with the gift of helps and service are like the hands of the body. A body with a mouth and no hands isn't going to accomplish much. Paul understood all that, and so he didn't think of Epaphroditus as an inferior or a subordinate, but as a **fellow worker**.

So are these glasses helping to get some things into focus about ministry? It makes us siblings. Serving side-by-side in ministry binds us together as brothers in a deep and meaningful fraternity in the camaraderie of ministry. And no role is more valuable than another, because we are all fellow servants in the cooperation of ministry.

The Courage of Ministry

25 ... My brother, fellow worker, and fellow soldier.

Now we are talking about warfare – fighting. If you are going to go to Rome and help Paul, that is going to mean taking on all of Paul's enemies - which were legion. For Paul, ministry wasn't just hard work; it was warfare. It was constant, incessant conflict - always under attack, from people outside the church and from people inside the church.

And not only was Paul under attack, but there were times when Paul needed to go on the offensive. Paul had to correct false doctrine, rebuke false teachers, oppose the wolves in sheep's clothing that would destroy the flock. You read 1 Corinthians or Galatians and you see that when someone was threatening the spiritual well-being of the church, Paul took the gloves off. So being a partner with Paul wasn't for the timid. It meant jumping right into the mix with some major spiritual warfare.

But that didn't stop Epaphroditus. He was a man of courage. This third description shows us the courage of ministry. That is tremendously important – even though we live in a culture that doesn't have much physical persecution. Fear is still a huge problem in ministry. Mostly it's fear of criticism, or fear of failure. I can't even tell you how many times I have seen people refuse to serve in ministry because of fear. Or leaders who don't have the courage to do the right thing because they are afraid of conflict. They don't want to do anything that might rock the boat, they don't want to take any risks, everything they do is calculated to avoid controversy, rather than to advance the work of the gospel. Courage is such an important virtue for ministry. So when we see it, let's celebrate it. That is worth throwing a party for.

The Commissioning of Ministry

So those first three descriptions are what Epaphroditus was to Paul – brother, fellow-worker, and fellow soldier. Now he gives a couple of descriptions of what Epaphroditus was to the Philippians. First, he says, "He's **your messenger**." The normal Greek word for messenger is *aggelos* (angel). But this is the word *apostolos* (apostle). An *aggelos* was someone sent with a message; and *apostolos* was someone sent on a mission. Usually the word *apostolos* refers to the 12 apostles – the apostles of Christ – 12 men sent out by Christ on a mission. But a couple times it is used to refer to apostles of the church – people who

are sent out by a local church on a mission. And we have an English word for that. What is our word for someone sent out by the church on a mission? Missionary. A missionary is someone sent out by the church on a mission. So instead of **your messenger**, I think a better translation would be, **your missionary**.

Now why does Paul feel the need to tell the Philippians what Epaphroditus was to them? It makes sense that he would say, “Here’s what he is to me...,” but why tell the Philippians that Epaphroditus is their missionary? Wouldn’t they already know that? Is Paul afraid they forgot that they sent him out? No. What’s happening here is Paul is putting the glasses on their face so they see the significance of the fact that they sent him. They might just think they sent some guy to carry a bag from point A to point B, and Paul wants them to understand that this is much more than that. This is full-blown missionary work. And to describe that, he uses a word that most of the time is reserved to describe the highest human office that has ever existed on earth – apostle. Paul wants them to see the significance of the fact that the church sent this man on a mission. That is huge, because the church is guided by the Holy Spirit, and so the decisions of a local church carry tremendous weight and authority. This is the commissioning of ministry. If a group of friends just got together and sent you out, that would be one thing. Or if a corporation sent you, or a government or a king or the President of the United States sent you, that’s one thing. But if a church sends you, that is a far, far greater thing, because the church is the body of Christ. When a church acts together as a church, it bears the very authority of Christ. An example of that is in Matthew 18 where Jesus said that if we follow his process in church discipline, he is here in our midst, and whatever we bind has been bound in heaven. In the book of Acts, whenever a church laid hands on someone to send them out, it was the Holy Spirit’s doing. The corporate actions of the church reflect the authority of Christ himself. Now obviously that’s not an absolute principle. It is possible for a church to err. But when a church is following the guidance of the Holy Spirit, their corporate actions carry a very special weight of authority. And so if a local church selects someone for a particular ministry, that’s a far greater thing than if someone just does it on his own.

And so Paul is letting the Philippians know the gravity of what they have done by sending him. Epaphroditus is a church-ordained missionary. So how does that help us? It teaches us the gravity and significance of ministry in the church. Even if it is something you stepped forward and volunteered to do, if the church affirms that by appointing you to do that ministry, that’s a big deal. Unless there is something unbiblical involved, then you should take that appointment as coming from Christ himself.

The Consecration of Ministry

Ok, so what are these glasses showing us about how to think about ministry? The camaraderie of ministry, the cooperation of ministry, the courage of ministry, and the commissioning of ministry. Now one final description. I’ll call this one the consecration of ministry. Consecrated is another word for holy. So this one is the holiness of ministry. Look at the end of verse 25. The Philippian church sent Epaphroditus out on a mission – but what mission? What did they commission him to do? The NIV says: **25 ... who is also your messenger (missionary), whom you sent to take care of my needs.** His task was to take care of Paul’s needs. That phrase (**whom you sent to take care of**) is actually a single word in the Greek: *leitourgos*. We get our word *liturgy* from it. And if that rings a bell it’s because back in verse 17 where Paul talked about the sacrifice and service coming from their faith, that word service is *leitourgia*. It is the word used all through the Old Testament to refer to the priestly service in the temple. So Paul just called the Philippians’ gift a *leitourgia* – a priestly service offered to God in worship, and now he calls Epaphroditus the *leitourgos* – the priest or minister who is carrying out that service. So let’s translate that word *minister*.

If someone asked Epaphroditus, “What do you do?”

“Oh, I’m a minister of the gospel.”

“Oh, you’re a preacher?”

“No.”

“A teacher?”

“No.”

“A church leader?”

“No.”

“Then what makes you a minister?”

“The church picked me to carry a bag of money from Philippi to Rome.”

If you do ministry, you are a minister. That’s why our banner says, “Every member a minister, every gift in use.” That is our goal. Once every gift is in use, then every member of Agape will be a minister, which is God’s design. God’s design is not for church leaders to be the ministers.

Ephesians 4:11 It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, 12 to equip God’s people for works of ministry

All of you are to be the ministers doing the ministry, and the leaders are to serve an equipping role for that. You might think that just writing a check isn’t really ministry. And if you think that, you probably really don’t think that delivering that check is ministry. But if we think that way, it’s because our vision is all clouded and we need to put these glasses on. Paul gives us some glasses so that we can see that doing a task like this is on par with an Old Testament priest carrying out the holy, consecrated ceremonies inside the temple of the living God. If you are doing something that contributes to the progress of the gospel, and it has been authorized by a local church, that is a holy, consecrated work. It doesn’t matter if it’s preaching a sermon or polishing a doorknob. If it contributes to the work of the gospel, it is a high and holy work.

The Motive of Ministry: Love

So now we have the glasses on. We can see the camaraderie, cooperation, courage, commissioning, and consecration of ministry. You want your life to have meaning and significance and purpose? Ministry is where you’re going to find that.

All of that is in verse 25. Now, starting in verse 26 Paul gives the reason why he’s sending Epaphroditus back home.

25 But I think it is necessary to send back to you Epaphroditus.

You read that and you think, “You’ve got to be kidding. You just made him out to be the most valuable asset imaginable, and now you’re going to send him away? Why?”

26 because he longs for all of you and is distressed because you heard he was ill. 27 Indeed he was ill, and almost died. But God had mercy on him, and not on him only but also on me, to spare me sorrow upon sorrow. 28 Therefore I am all the more eager to send him, so that when you see him again you may be glad and I may have less anxiety.

These relationships – between the Philippians and Epaphroditus and Paul are saturated with so much love it’s hard to even keep track of all of it. This shows us the motive of ministry, which is love. The Philippians got the news about Epaphroditus being sick, but they haven’t gotten the news about his surprise recovery. Back then the mail system was mainly for government use, so there was no way to get news from Rome to Philippi unless you know somebody who happened to be traveling there. So his friends back home heard that he was really sick, and they are probably figuring that he’s dead by now. His mom and dad think he’s dead, all his friends - and he just thinks about their distress, and he can’t stand it. So they are in distress because they heard that their dear friend Epaphroditus was in distress with some terrible illness. Epaphroditus doesn’t have that distress anymore because he’s healed, but now he is in distress because he knows that they are in distress about what they think is his distress. And Paul sees their distress over what they think is Epaphroditus’ distress, and he sees Epaphroditus’ distress over their distress, and he sits back and says, “This whole thing is stressing me out.” So everybody’s in distress. And so Paul says, “I can solve this whole thing with one simple action. Epaphroditus, just go back to Philippi. Then they will be happy because they know you’re okay, you’ll be happy because they won’t be worried anymore and because you get to be with your friends again, and I’ll be happy because finally everybody’s happy.”

Paul's Love

And who comes out on the short end of all this? The Philippians are longing for their friend, and they get what they want. Epaphroditus longs for his friends back home, and he gets what he wants. And Paul gets left in prison alone. From an earthly point of view, it seems like he's the one most in need, and yet it seems like he gets the worst deal. So why did Paul do this? He tells us why in verse 28. Look at the end of the verse.

28 ... that I may have less anxiety.

That's why he did it – to solve his anxiety problem. Paul doesn't say, "This will be a loss to me, but I'm willing to do it for your sake." He says, "I'm doing it for my own joy!" That's a great principle for anyone who struggles with anxiety. One of the best cures for the problem of anxiety is to do something to make others happy in the Lord. When you do that, even if it costs you something very precious, it will bring you joy and take away your anxiety. Putting others interests ahead of your own isn't a sacrifice. It's a way to increase your own joy.

God's Mercy

The motive for all ministry is love for God And if you need more love for people, turn your attention to God's love. Paul helps us with that in verse 27. Look what he says about God in that verse.

27 Indeed he was ill, and almost died. But God had mercy² on him,

It was merciful for God to spare his life. Even though this life is painful and it involves a lot of suffering, still, this life is a gift from God. Every hour your heart keeps on beating is God's mercy. In chapter 1 Paul longed to depart and be with Christ, yet for now he would rather remain on earth, so he could carry on with his calling. As much as Paul wanted to go to heaven, he wanted even more to complete his earthly mission first. And allowing him to do so was God's mercy.

The Loves of Others is Mercy on Us

So God had mercy on Epaphroditus.

27 ... and not on him only but also on me, to spare me sorrow upon sorrow.

Not only was the recovery mercy on Epaphroditus, it was mercy on Paul, to spare him the waves of sorrow he would have if Epaphroditus died. Did you know that God is showing you mercy just by letting your loved ones continue to live? That's mercy. And it's important for us to understand that, because many people just expect it from God. They expect their loved ones to continue to live, and so if one of them dies, they get angry at God – as if God took away something that was their right. No, having a mother or a father or a child or a friend continue to live – that's God's mercy on your life. It is not something he owes you; it is something he graciously, mercifully grants.

² When we suffer or are in trouble, God's great heart is filled with compassion that moves him to have mercy on us. Here are some examples: Gen 39:21; Exo 3:7; Exo 20:6; Deut 30:3; Deut 33:27; 2Sa 7:15; 2Sa 24:14; 2Ch 36:15; Neh 1:5; Psa 5:7; Psa 5:23; Psa 34:6; Psa 36:5; Psa 36:7; Psa 81:10; Psa 86:5; Psa 89:28-34; Psa 103:14-17; Psa 108:4; Psa 116:1-9; Psa 116:136; Isa 1:18; Isa 1:40; Isa 42:3; Isa 53:4-6; Isa 54:7; Isa 55:1-7; Isa 63:7-9; Jer 12:15; Jer 31:34; Lam 3:22, Lam 3:32-33; Eze 33:11; Hos 11:4, Hos 11:8; Joe 2:13; Jon 4:11; Mic 7:18-20; Nah 1:7; Zep 3:17; Zec 9:9; Mat 5:7; Mat 9:13, Mat 9:27-31, Mat 9:36; Mat 11:28-29; Mat 12:7; Mat 14:14; Mat 15:21-28; Mat 17:14-18; Mat 18:27, Mat 18:33; Mat 20:29-34; Mat 23:23, Mat 23:37; Mar 1:41; Mar 5:19; Mar 6:34; Mar 10:14, Mar 10:46-52; Luk 1:46-80; Luk 7:13; Luk 8:54-55; Luk 10:25-37; Luk 12:32; Luk 14:23; Luk 15:7, Luk 15:20-24; Luk 16:24; Luk 17:11-19; Luk 18:35-43; Luk 23:34, Luk 23:43; Joh 3:16-17; Joh 10:11-16; Joh 11:5, Joh 11:35; Joh 14:1-3; Joh 14:17; Joh 19:25-27; Joh 21:15-17; Act 2:46-47; Rom 5:8-10; Rom 8:26-39; Rom 9:15-18, Rom 9:23; Rom 11:30-32; 1Co 7:25, 2Co 4:1; 2Co 6:17-18; Gal 2:20; Gal 6:16; Eph 2:1-10; Eph 3:14-19; Col 3:12-17; 1Th 4:17-18; 1Ti 1:2, 1Ti 1:13-16; 2Ti 1:2, 2Ti 1:16, 2Ti 1:18; 2Ti 4:8, Tit 2:11; Tit 3:5; Heb 2:17; Heb 4:14-16; Heb 7:25; Jas 2:13; Jas 3:17; Jas 4:5; 1Pe 1:3, 1Pe 1:18-19; 1Pe 2:10; 1Jn 1:9; 1Jn 3:1-3; 2Jn 1:3; Jud 1:2, Jud 1:21; Rev 7:9-17; Rev 21:1-7.

We always think that the normal state of affairs should be health and safety. When suffering comes, we are shocked and we panic until relief, then we think things are back to normal “It’s about time.” But that’s backwards. We should expect suffering (1 Pe.4:12), and when it isn’t present – that’s something extra to praise God for.

Appropriate Grief

Another thing worth noting here is that grief over losing a loved one is appropriate. The book of Philippians is all about joy. Paul is urging us, over and over, to have joy.

Philippians 3:1 Finally, my brothers, rejoice in the Lord!

Philippians 4:4 Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! ... 6 Do not be anxious about anything

And yet wave upon wave of sorrow would have been appropriate if Epaphroditus died. When you see commands to rejoice always, don’t think that emotions of sadness and sorrow are ungodly. There are contexts when sorrow is appropriate.

Conclusion

So that brings us to the end of chapter 2. I hope you have found these examples motivating. I think it would be so pleasing to the Lord if the whole church just came out of the study of Philippians 2 fired up with renewed passion for ministry. One thing I love about you is that you always respond to God’s Word. If I get up here and try to give you a big pep talk about ministry or try to get you excited through some video or multimedia presentation, that may not do much. But one thing I’ve always noticed is that when you see something in Scripture, you respond. So we’ve seen it in Scripture. If the apostle Paul is willing to pour out his life on the ground like a drink offering, and thinks of the ministry of the church as being far greater than his own ministry, and if a man like Timothy can give up all the comforts of life and be available to go wherever he’s needed because he has more anxiety about the interests of others above his own interests, and he was humble enough to make himself everyone’s slave, and he’s equipped for the task because he had enough humility to be teachable and learn like a kid with his dad, and if Epaphroditus can be so devoted to a mundane, logistical task in the ministry that he would roll the dice with his own life, and keep pressing forward even when he was deathly ill, And if Paul can give up the help he needed while he was in prison just to bring joy to some others in the church, and if the Lord Jesus Christ can give up the glories of heaven and take on human flesh and be found in the form of a slave and become obedient to the point of death – even death on a cross – willingly submitting to crucifixion to serve our interests; if they can do all that, will you pour out your life in ministry?

Benediction: Psalm 20:1 May the LORD answer you when you are in distress; may the name of the God of Jacob protect you. 2 May he send you help from the sanctuary and grant you support from Zion. 4 May he give you the desire of your heart and make all your plans succeed. 5 May the LORD grant all your requests.

Application Questions (James 1:25)

- 1) Which of the five “lenses” from the glasses do you think your eyes need the most to give you a clear understanding of ministry (camaraderie, cooperation, courage, commissioning, consecration)?
- 2) Share with the group the two or three gifts where you scored the highest, and the top two or three ministry categories you are most passionate about.

- 3) What treasures, circumstances, etc. in your life are most prone to hold you back from ministry for fear of losing them?
- 4) Has anything changed in your heart of your life as a result of this series on passionate servanthood?