

Partakers of Grace as a Team

Partakers of Grace

By Steve Viars

sermonaudio.com

Bible Text: Philippians 2:19-30
Preached On: Sunday, September 27, 2015

Faith Church
5526 State Road 26 E
Lafayette, IN 47905

Website: <http://www.faithlafayette.org/church>
Online Sermons: <http://www.sermonaudio.com/faithlafayette>

Last weekend the Purdue football team celebrated the 15th reunion of their Big Ten championship team so Joe Tiller returned along with many of the players who were on the team that year. One of the themes that emerged last weekend was how poorly ranked their recruiting class was. For example Vinny Sutherland said, "We didn't have the most talent in the world but we fought hard and we were all tough." Akin Ayodele spoke about the togetherness they shared. He said, "These guys I hold dear to my heart. They really were like brothers. We built a bond here that forever will be." Well, that group eventually went to the Rose Bowl and poorly ranked or not, became one of the most memorable football teams in Purdue's last half century.

Compare that to the exciting announcement that was made this week just a couple of miles south of our Faith East campus about SIA planning a \$141 million dollar expansion. It's likely to create an additional 1,200 jobs on top of the \$400 million dollar expansion that's already underway. Local columnist Dave Bangert wrote a commentary about that news that included these words, he said,

"Leave it to Tony Roswarski on Monday to turn one of Lafayette's biggest job announcements in the past decade — capacity for 100,000 more vehicles and 1,200 new jobs coming to the Subaru of Indiana Automotive plant — into a sermon on cooperation, commitment and community.

Oh, and you.

Yes, you."

He went on to say

"If you've ever listened to Roswarski at all, you know the Lafayette mayor comes back to those themes early and often when talking about working with West Lafayette, Tippecanoe County and the state to make it clear that this place is ready for business development.

Egos and party politics in the backseat, jobs up front.

With a room filled with dignitaries, Roswarski spread the accolades even wider for 'a community with a we-will-get-it-done attitude.'

'And not just in words, but in action. Boots on the ground,' Roswarski said. 'I can tell you, I never, never take that for granted. ... I thank all of the citizens, young and old, of Lafayette, or West Lafayette, of Tippecanoe County who get up every day and do their part to make this a wonderful, vibrant community where announcements like this are possible.'"

Then Bangert said his point,

"Even those in the background can send the right or wrong messages about quality of life and being able to handle prosperity well."

No question about the fact that we're talking here about two historic wins: the Boilermakers going to the Rose Bowl, a jobs announcement of historic proportions, but did you note the similarities? Not a focus on a few but on an entire team coming together to accomplish something significant together.

Now, please broaden that out to where we are in our study of the book of Philippians. Chapter 2 is an incredibly powerful and practical section of the Scripture. I hope you're reading it. I hope you're meditating upon it this fall, but Paul speaks about the importance of the church family, the team so to speak, by saying, "being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose." Then he said, "Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit." It sounds a lot like egos and party politics in the backseat, doesn't it? "Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit." He went on in that passage to explain, "That's the mind of Christ. When you live that way, that is the mind of Christ." Then he described the essence of the Gospel, Jesus' death, burial and resurrection as providing the foundation and the enablement and the power and the example for followers of Christ to actually be able to live this way. Then he instructed us to "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling for it is God who is at work in you both to will and to work for his good pleasure." So apparently this issue of accomplishing something together in a unified fashion is going to require a level of work. It's going to require a level of effort on our part.

Then Paul makes things really specific by pointing out two tendencies that will poison any team, whether sports or business or community, certainly among the family of God when he says, "Do all things without grumbling or disputing." Oh, that kind of work producing that kind of unity.

Then he turns to the great victory that can be accomplished, not a Rose Bowl appearance, not a great jobs announcement, but he says, you'll "prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation," now hear this: "among whom you appear as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life." The privilege and the task of making a positive spiritual impact in the

life of someone around you; being an ambassador for Christ; being a bright light in the world in which we live.

With that in mind now, if you haven't already, please open your Bible to Philippians 2. That's on page 154 of the back section, the New Testament, of the Bible under the chair in front of you.

I think it's very instructive to see that just like Akin Ayodele, just like Tony Roswarski, at this point in the logic, after talking about the challenge, the privilege of being a bright light in the world, now Paul turns to specific members of the church family. We're talking this morning about being partakers of grace as a team and as I read this passage, I want to ask you to be looking for three people who are being discussed. You'll see them. They're very, very obvious. And how and why their contributions to the accomplishment of their God-given mission was so important but also this: so reproducible. You see, these examples are here at this point in this chapter because you and I can and you and I should be just like this.

We're in Philippians 2, beginning in verse 17 where Paul starts with himself. He says, "But even if I am being poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrifice and service of your faith," now, note that carefully, please. "Even if I am being poured out as a drink offering but upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I rejoice and share my joy with you all. You too, I urge you, rejoice in the same way and share your joy with me." So there is the example of Paul, then secondly, verse 19, "But I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you shortly, so that I also may be encouraged when I learn of your condition. For I have no one else of kindred spirit," I wonder what that means? "Who will genuinely be concerned for your welfare. For they," sadly, "all seek after their own interests, not those of Christ Jesus. But you know of his proven worth, that he served with me in the furtherance of the gospel like a child serving his father. Therefore I hope to send him immediately, as soon as I see how things go with me; and I trust in the Lord that I myself also will be coming shortly. But I thought," third example, "I thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier, who is also your messenger and minister to my need," in other words, he carried the gift, "because he was longing for you all," listen to this, "and was distressed because you had heard that he was sick." Not he was distressed that he was sick, he was distressed because you had heard that he was sick. "For indeed he was sick to the point of death, but God had mercy on him, and not on him only but also on me, so that I would not have sorrow upon sorrow. Therefore I have sent him all the more eagerly so that when you see him again you may rejoice and I may be less concerned about you. Receive him then in the Lord with all joy, and," listen to this, "hold men like him in high regard." Why? Why? "Because he came close to death for the work of Christ, risking his life," circle that in your mind, please, "risking his life to complete what was deficient in your service to me."

So we're talking this morning about partakers of grace as a team and with the time we have left, let's be looking for three examples of the kind of people who help the church family accomplish our task and I hope you're asking, kind of in the background of your mind right now: how does God want me to be like each one of these persons? And am I

like each one of these persons? And how could I be more like each one of these persons? Three kinds of people who help the church family accomplish our task.

One has to do with the focus of Paul. I think these verses help us understand why this man has played such an important role in the development of the early church. You could summarize verses 17 and 18 by saying he was glad being an offering. He was glad to be an offering. He said, "even if I am being poured out as a drink offering." You say, "What's that about? What's that about?" Well, it's a beautiful picture of a libation or a drink offering. Part of the sacrificial system prescribed in places like Leviticus 23 was that when a meat offering was being made, that was the primary focus, the meat offering, that the priest would also pour out a glass of wine or oil or sometimes even honey on the meat or on the ground in front of the fire to accentuate or enhance the main offering. You need to have that picture in your mind and Paul is saying, "That's what my life is like. Not the main offering." No, he's saying, "I'm like the drink offering. I'm the poured out."

Now, some people believe his point is that he will be poured out if he's martyred at the end of his imprisonment and trial. I don't think that actually fits with this particular context. You saw him say, "I'm probably going to be following up Timothy's visit." It's more likely and even the grammar of this text would suggest he understands his life right now, in the past, in the present and in the future is being poured out as an offering to his Savior and he's more than just okay with that. He's happy about it. He's joyful about that.

Now, here's the logical question, please don't miss this point because it goes along with what I was saying earlier in those two illustrations at the beginning: if he's not viewing his life as the main offering, then who or what occupies that position? Now, look carefully at verse 17: what's the answer to that question? "Even if I am being poured out as a drink offering upon," what? "Upon the sacrifice and service of your faith." You see, the point here is that he valued what other people on the team were doing. Take what we've said so far and read it back into this text, "But even if I am being poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrifice and the service of your faith." Now, think about that: he knew they were living for the Gospel where the Lord had placed them. They were being bright lights in the city which God had called them just like he had mentioned in the previous verses. They were doing what he had taught them to do and what he had modeled before them both now and then and in many cases they were undoubtedly paying a significant price to do so and so Paul's point is: you're like the primary offering and what's happening to me here in Rome in prison is just the libation, the drink offering, that makes your lives and your ministry in Philippi even sweeter or more pleasant to the God we're worshiping together.

Do you remember what the columnist said about the announcement this week? "Ego and party politics in the backseat." That's exactly what Paul is doing here; his focus is not on himself. That's the argument of the text: his focus is on them.

Then he invites them to participate in that exact same kind of mentality. He says, "I rejoice and share my joy with you all." Now, "You too, I urge you, rejoice in the same way and share your joy with me." Now, how odd that a man in prison writing to a group

of people who were suffering would speak about the possibility of their mutual joy. John MacArthur explains this when he says, "A believer's joy comes at the point of greatest sacrifice because serving God is the supreme purpose of their existence." Now, just chew on that for a minute. A believer's joy comes at the point of greatest sacrifice because serving God is the supreme purpose of their existence and I think we would all say, "If I let it be." Right? If I let it be. "Unfortunately," MacArthur goes on to say, "many believers experience joy in much the same way as the world does. When circumstances are favorable, they're happy, but when circumstances are unfavorable, they're sad and sometimes resentful. The only thing that would bring them joy are those that promote their own interests and welfare, but when believers seek to do the Father's will and please him, they view sacrifice for him with joy. The reason many believers know little about Paul's kind of joy is that they know little about Paul's kind of sacrifice." Now, when you put all this together, thank the Lord for a leader like Paul who was used of God to lead many of them to Christ and to start this church but who now values what each and every one of them is doing to help the family joyfully accomplish this mission together.

We had an interesting example of this a little bit over a week ago in our pastor and deacons meeting and we were talking about the upcoming 25th anniversary of the Living Nativity here at Faith. Can you believe that? This year is the 25th anniversary of that event so we're going to be doing some special things to celebrate that milestone that we think our church and our community are going to enjoy together. But at the meeting, we're all just sitting around and we took some time to review some of the group's best Living Nativity memories. So we had all the pastors, all the deacons and we just said, "Hey, what do you remember? What was your favorite memory about the Living Nativity?" And it was just one of those many times where I wish I would have thought in advance to video it. It was really just a priceless conversation for sure because it wasn't a bunch of guys clamoring for attention, "Well, I did this. Or, don't forget my important contribution." Nor was it a bunch of whining about how hard it was or how big a sacrifice. No. No. Although a number of those guys were like Paul in the sense that they had led important aspects of it; they had sacrificed a lot. But the focus was on how much fun it had been to do that over the years and especially to do that as a team and to rejoice in how God used somebody else, and how God used somebody else, and how God used somebody else.

There are a lot of people in our church who are like Paul in that they were used of God to start something around here or lead something around here for a long time but their narrative as they rehearse what's occurred is, "I was just like the drink offering. That's what I was. I was like the drink offering but it just accented all the wonderful things many others were doing." There is a lot of joy right there. Regardless of the cost, there is a lot of joy right there. That focus will lead to a team win for the church family every time.

So there is the focus of Paul, but there is also the faithfulness of Timothy. If you're new to studying the Bible, this is Paul's protegee, literally his son in the faith, and we know quite a bit about Timothy because he was such a blessing to Paul. He was such an important figure in the establishment of the early church. For example, we know that he

was a native of Lystra in the province of Galatia which is modern day Turkey. We know that both his bother and his grandmother were followers of Christ; they had a profound impact on him spiritually. We read about that in places like 2 Timothy 3:14 where Paul said to Timothy, "You, however," after talking about the terrible conditions of the last days, "You, however, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus." Well, Timothy's father was probably a pagan and what that means is that this instruction that Paul just talked about, "and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings," that would have come from his mother and that would have come from his grandmother.

Paul loved Timothy deeply. He spoke about him in many other places in the Scripture as, for example, "my true child in the faith." So Paul had led Timothy to Christ. He spoke about him as "my beloved son." He called him "my beloved and faithful child in the Lord. My fellow worker," in Romans 16. As "our brother," when he was describing him to the church in Corinth. Here's what that means: every Paul needs a Timothy. There is no question about that. Every Paul needs a Timothy or every Pauline needs a Timera. That's the best I could do, but it's equally true for ladies who are carrying heavy loads of ministry in the church as well. You see, the Pauls of the world need to know that. They do. And the Timothys. The potential Timothys of the world need to know that. Here's the beauty: throughout the course of your Christian life, God may want you to function in both roles. Do you realize that? God may want you to function in both roles and hear this: sometimes even simultaneously.

Now, more on that in just a minute, but let's dig into what was said here. Timothy was faithful because he was on the same page with Paul ministerially. Paul said, "I have no one else of kindred spirit." It's a beautiful word in the original, isopsychos. Isos, equal. Psyche, soul. So when we talk about someone who's a kindred spirit, we're literally talking about someone who, and this is what Paul and Timothy were like, they were equal souled. They were one soul. What a great thing that Paul wanted fellow workers like this, huh? Some people just want to be the main thing and no place for anybody else. No, no, no, the polar opposite here. Paul wanted a Timothy. He wanted a kindred spirit. He wanted someone who was equal souled or one souled. Also, thank God that the young buck, thank God that Timothy was willing to be trained in this particular way. That's how things get done in the church. We don't care about who gets the credit, we're constantly training and being trained.

When I came here 28 years ago now with my family, Pastor Goode, Pastor Nichols, Pastor Riley, Doc Smith, John M., Mike K., Chester B., a whole host of other people, began pouring time into me. You might say, "Well, that's quite a list. You must have needed a lot of help." Apparently. Apparently. By the way, I'm not blaming all my failures and shortcomings on them, okay? Believe me, they tried. They tried.

But the core issue involved in being able to work, you say, "How was it that older and younger were able to work together so well?" Well, it wasn't because we were from the

same place in the country because we weren't. It's not because we had education from the same place because we didn't. The key issue of being able to work together in a unified way in a church is our commitment and was our commitment to core philosophy of ministry values, especially about the supremacy of Christ and the sufficiency of Scripture. Pastor Goode and I used to be able to finish one another's sentences. That's just the way it was. In many ways, we were equal souled. We were kindred spirits. Not in every last way but on the things that mattered. When it came to philosophy of ministry, the supremacy of Christ, the sufficiency of the word of God, the importance of practical progressive sanctification, we could finish one another's sentences. Kindred spirits.

Now, just pause. Push the pause button on that for a minute and think about how that could apply to you. Perhaps the Lord wants you to consider ways you can and should be a Paul. You're already leading a ministry, thank God for the many who are. You're already making a difference but are you sure first that you're valuing the contribution of others. You don't want to be the main sacrifice, you want to view yourself as the drink offering that just accentuates what obviously Christ ultimately and others have done and are doing. So you don't need to be or want to be the main thing but also, are you on the lookout for some Timothys that you can be pouring your life into. Perhaps this verse will help us at this point in the discussion where Paul said to Timothy, already looking to the next generation, "The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also."

So in our terminology today, here's what we would say, "You have to be willing to delegate, Paul. You have to be willing to delegate, and potential Timothy, you have to want to be trained. You have to be willing to work under someone so that you can be trained." You say, "What does that look like in real time in a church? What does this look like?" Well, I had a great example of this this week. This is an email I received from Bryce H. late Sunday evening. Bryce and Heather have done a fabulous job of leading Christmas for Everyone for years, the kind of people you just want to clone and, frankly you realize, that's the whole point. That is the point of what we're talking about here: how do you clone faithful people? Here's what he said, "Pastor Viars, I wanted to give you a quick update on some activity for Christmas for Everyone." He said, "Heather and I will be partnering with Matt and Nadia B. on leading Christmas for Everyone. Heather and I have no intention of stepping down from leading the program but as we discussed," he and I, "it's always good to have another couple learning the ins and outs of the ministry in the event that we get relocated or hit by a bus." We don't even have bus service out here, but he said, "I'm also excited about bringing a fresh set of eyes into the program and being able to have some additional horsepower to," do you see that? That's how Paul talks about Timothy. That's the way that works.

Then he said, "We're going to have a kickoff meeting on October 1st at 7:00 at the Faith East Community Center with partner churches. That would be an excellent meeting to invite a perspective church that would be interested in joining the program if you have any in mind. I'm also happy to meet with any perspective churches individually to tell them about the program if they can't be at the kickoff meeting." Now you see what's

happening, now we're talking about doing that on a corporate level. We're talking about partnering with others every way we possibly can in our community.

Then he said this, "When we spoke last winter, you mentioned looking for a person that could help grow the bonus gift donation corporate participation part of the program. I have been concerned that I would like to find a way to do better at that." Then he said, "I'd be thrilled to work with some additional horsepower that could help coordinate some of the bonus gift donation efforts. Let me know how you would like me to proceed with this." In other words: let's find another Timothy who can work on that particular area of the program.

Now, what I'm saying is: Bryce and Heather are functioning like Paul or Pauline. And Matt and Nadia are functioning like Timothy or Timera. And I could give all sorts of examples of how that's happening right now among our church family for which I'm very, very thankful. For example, in our ministry resource center, my mom has taken a rather significant amount of responsibility in the MRC. I'm glad for that Pauline, for sure. Well, it's time for her to start offloading some of that for just a whole lot of reasons and Lyse A. and Marny R. are stepping up in order to be trained in that ministry and continue to take more and more of that leadership responsibility. That is exactly what we're talking about and so if you're the Paul type, in other words you're carrying a heavy load of ministry, thank God for you. I'm asking you, are you going to let these verses help you say, "Do you know what? I want to be sure it's not about my credit. I'm not worried about that. I want to be sure that I'm constantly focusing on the value that others bring to the team and I just need to be on the lookout for a Timothy. I need to be on the lookout for someone that I can train and pour my life into to make another isopsyche. I didn't even know what that was." Well, you do now. Kindred spirit. Same soul.

Now, here's the other side of that, in fact, I'm convinced that there are a number of people who are going to hear this message, here's the takeaway and I hope you don't miss it: others needs to say, "You know, I want to step up and be a Timothy," meaning, "I want to come alongside an established ministry leader to be a source of refreshment to that person, to lighten their load, to learn their craft, and most importantly to have their soul reproduced in me. I want to become a kindred spirit." And if you would say, "Well, they don't need me because they've got excellence at every position." Seriously? A. We're getting older. There are some old horses around here who need a fresh colt. B. We've got more things we want to do for God than we're doing right now. Right? Don't you get me wound up. Yeah, and you can't start new ministries without having willing ministers. So the question is: is it possible that God may be saying to you through this passage this morning it's time for you to present yourself as a potential Timothy.

You say, "How would I even do that?" Let's just say, here's what the answer isn't: sit around and wait until somebody asks you. What's up with that? You need to be more excited about proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ that you would show some initiative to get yourself in the game. So if you need to do that, I want to challenge you to do that. You say, "Well, then how exactly would I do that?" Well, here's one, I'll give you some examples, alright? I'll give you some specific takeaways. One is just talk to the person.

"I've watched So-and-so or a couple lead that particular ministry. I love what they're doing. I love their passion. I want to say to them, 'Hey, could I work under you and lighten your load and just learn your heart?'" You could do that. Now, if you're going to go that way, look right at me for a minute, it is possible they might say, "Well, do you know what? We would love to have you do that. We need you. We want you. But here's the qualifications for serving in that particular way. Are you sure you meet them?" You say, "What? There are qualifications for this?" Absolutely. Absolutely. We're going to be serving with excellence according to the word of God so don't be afraid of qualifications.

They might say this, "Man, I'm so glad. We need you. Please read this book that can help you understand why that's so important to us." Now, you see, that might mean if you really want to be an effective Timothy...kindred spirit, it's not like I just pass the person in the hallway. No, you're going to have to do some work. Remember what we learned earlier in that text? Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling and don't be afraid of that. I promise you, when you get to the judgment seat of Christ you're not going to say, "Man, I wish I hadn't done so much for God. I wish I had watched another football game." At some point, Timothys get the fact that, "I want to be on the core mission. I want to help my church be a bright light in the community in which we've been placed."

Now, if you say, "I'm not sure I want to go that route." Okay, here's another route. I'm going to give you several because I love you, would just be to talk to your service pastor. That's one of the reasons we have service pastors at each one of our five worship services is to help you in that particular endeavor and we would be more than happy to have your service pastor make that connection and maybe even talk to you about, "Here are some of my gifts. Here are some of my interests. Where would I best be used as a person who is being trained and mentored for further ministry?"

Obviously you could speak to your deacon. You could speak to your ABF leader. You could take to Sherry S. who oversees human resources. You could always contact me or one of your pastors but what I'm saying is: churches exist and churches thrive because of people like Paul and Timothy. That's how we accomplish the task of being a bright light. And if you're not in one of those positions now, why not use the beauty of this text to motivate you to decide right now...that's something else about this, when it's all said and done, there is often more said than done in a church and I just want to encourage you to decide right now that you're going to take specific action steps in that direction.

Now, what else do we see about Timothy here? The text goes on to say and you've got to love this, he was genuinely concerned. Paul said, "I have no one else of kindred spirit who will genuinely be concerned for your welfare." We would say it this way in our culture, "She gets it. She's concerned about the things that matter. He gets it." And it's sad that Paul had to report that a lot of people even in that church apparently didn't or, at least where he was at the time, they actually seek after their own interests and not those of Christ Jesus. What a sad, boring, unproductive way to live, huh? You're not doing that, are you? I hope not.

That, by the way, explains why we're so interested in being a blessing to the more economically challenged areas of downtown. We want to be concerned about that. Or places where there may be more crime. We want to be concerned about that. Or places where there may be potential racial tension. We want to be concerned about that. So we're asking how could the interests of Christ be furthered in such locations out of genuine, heartfelt concern for everybody who lives in our community. That's why we're going to be receiving a special Christmas offering for our Cooler Keg project. We should have the drawings and the initial pricing in the next couple of weeks but it's likely that in order to tear that hot mess down and replace it with a neighborhood park and then a neighborhood resource center, probably somewhere in the neighborhood of \$750-800,000.

We don't have the pricing back but it's going to be somewhere in that neighborhood. Well, the seminary is investing \$250,000 because there will be several apartments on the upper floor of that building for our next cohort of seminary students because we believe in incarnational ministry. We believe if you're really going to make a difference there has to be a relationship so seminary students are going to be living right there on Hartford Street in the north end between Sixth and Seventh.

Well, we're going to be prayerfully seeking to raise about \$500,000 this Christmas for that particular project. We think it's good for us to tackle projects from time-to-time. You see, where your treasure is, you say, "How do I get that concern going?" Thank you for asking. Where your treasure is, there your heart also will be. You see, sacrificial focused giving is part of what develops kindred spirits.

Paul goes on to say his faithfulness was proven. "You know of his proven worth, that he served with me in the furtherance of the gospel like a child serving his father." Can I ask you, "Wouldn't you want that to be said of you?" Could it be said of you? What would it take for that to be said of you? You know, that's one of the primary reasons we started our seminary right there, right there: training Timothys. Training Timothys. Training Timothys. And the reason we got involved in it was we were concerned about where the paradigm was going. Generally speaking, when a man was called into the ministry, he and his wife would leave their local church and go off to a seminary and that was happening later and later in life so generally they had a couple of kids in tow, he was having to work full-time in secular employment and go to school part-time. They are amassing an incredible amount of debt. By the time they get through seminary, now he's near 40 years old. His marriage is strained. He's in financial difficulty. He barely knows the names of his kids. He has struggled with the academic part because how do you work all night at UPS and then pay attention during the day in Hebrew class, for crying out loud? And as far as being meaningfully involved in local church ministry, it's very, very hard because you just don't have the energy for that.

So we said, "No, let's change the paradigm. Let's ask a couple of our guys to go and get Ph.D.s and so that's what Pastor Aucoin did in Old Testament. There's some fun, huh? Then Pastor Green did that in New Testament. Why? Because we asked them to. That's why, because we asked them to. Then we asked our church family to take on the

significant responsibility of providing paid internships for these young people who are going through seminary so when they come, they have to be debt free. Then they receive a paid internship, free housing, the moment they come in. They receive an excellent academic education and, yes, it's a work study program. They're working in their church so they're getting three years of ministry experience, especially focused on biblical counseling and community based outreach ministry.

I was telling somebody the other day, I think when the dust settles, Faith Bible Seminary may be one of the most effective ministries we ever started because of the impact. Right now I'm teaching one of the classes this fall. That's the group that I'm teaching or at least a portion of the group that I'm teaching, and I took that particular picture because it also shows on the back wall we have the technology in place where guys attend our classes from other places. So a couple of those guys are from Maine. I think three of them are from Maine. One is from Ohio. One is from Illinois. It's easier for them to stay in their local churches but receive their academic training from us. Anytime they raise their hand, you just go, boop, their picture goes from there to the front screen. They are participating in the class. It's amazing how well that technology works and what I was thinking as I've been teaching that class this fall is what a great group of guys. What an excellent group of guys and one of the reasons is because their local church family has been pouring into them for these last three years, training and developing Timothys and training and developing Timothys.

Now, let me ask you again: how do you think the Lord wants to use this passage in your life? And maybe I need to, as my favorite son Bear often says, "Back up the truck for a minute." All of this assumes that you have a personal relationship with Christ. That you're on the team. And if you've never trusted Christ as Savior and Lord, we want to invite you to do that. But if you have, we want to encourage you to think about, "How can I help our church family accomplish its mission?"

The focus of Paul and the faithfulness of Timothy and then the passage ends with the fearlessness of Epaphroditus. Here's the man who has chosen to carry the financial gift from their church in Philippi to where Paul was imprisoned in Rome. Part of what's instructive is while we know lots of background about Timothy, we know practically nothing about Epaphroditus. Do you realize that? Which may be for the person around here who would say, "Well, my gifts are meager. I'm kind of quiet. I'm just getting started in all this." Really, all we know about this man is he was available, and you realize that's one of the essential pre-requisites to making a difference in a church helping us be a bright light is being available.

We also know that while he was with Paul, he became deathly ill literally. Paul said this, "For indeed he was sick to the point of death, but God had mercy on him, and not on him only but also on me, so that I would not have sorrow upon sorrow." Apparently that word got back to the Philippians and that's what bothered Epaphroditus. It wasn't that he was sick but he was distressed because they had heard that he was sick. In other words, he's worried because they're worried.

And Paul didn't want there to be any question about what he thought of them so he said, "Receive him then in the Lord with all joy," and here it is, "and hold men like him in high regard; because he came close to death for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete what was deficient in your service to me." It's not just about the nature of his distress, it's about the adventure of his life. He was risking his life to complete what was deficient in your service to me. He was willing to take risks to serve God, not in a reckless fashion, but friends, have you learned the difference? There's a difference between being reckless and taking appropriate ministry risks. There is no such thing as stewardship apart from that and Paul says, "hold such people as this in high regard because of his fearlessness."

You know, I'm thankful, I'm very thankful. Mayor Roswarski talked about how thankful he was this week, I'll tell you, I'm very, very thankful because there are a lot of Pauls in this church. They are the kind of people who like being involved in ministry leadership. They like being involved in helping us be a bright light in the community in which God has placed us. And they're really not interested in getting thanks, getting credit, getting whatever. At best, they just view themselves as a drink offering and they're constantly on the lookout for the next Timothy. I'm thankful for people like that. There are a lot.

I'm thankful for the Timothys. I'm thankful for persons who are saying, "I want to develop a kindred spirit. I want to work under someone. I want to be trained and then I want to lighten their load."

I'm glad for people like Epaphroditus. Not reckless but understanding that there are always risks involved in ministry for Christ and if that's what he's called us to do, then we're going to embrace it with joy.

Let's stand together for prayer, shall we?

Father in heaven, Lord, thank you that at this particular point in the book you chose not to give us additional teaching as much as you gave us three very concrete examples. Father, it's always easier to live for you when we can look to some man or some woman who has gone before us and so, Lord, we thank you for these three examples today.

Father, for the ways that any of us are living in a way that is consistent with this text, we give you praise. Just like we were singing about earlier, it's only by the blood of Christ that we could slay this sin of selfishness. So, Lord, we give you praise for that.

Lord, if there are steps we need to take as a result of what this text is saying, even if it's going to require us to work out our salvation more, even if it's going to require a price that perhaps before we've not been willing to pay, Lord, I pray that the privilege of our church being the bright light that you have called us to be here and around the world would be so exciting to us that we would be willing to take whatever step is necessary to make that happen more. Lord, we ask this in Christ's name. Amen.