

# **Sending Forth Our Best**

**Wednesday 3/6/19 – Jeff Lyle**

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**A healthy church will eventually become a sending church. The heart of the father is not for churches to continue to balloon in numerical growth without sending forth some in the flock to help other assemblies of believers who need their assistance. Church revitalization and church planting are clear components of New Testament mission. When the time comes to send forth people to new works, whom do we send? From Paul's letter to the Philippians, we learn that he believed in releasing his top-tier co-laborers to go and begin new works. What he says about Timothy and Epaphroditus will help modern believers understand some of what makes us valuable to the mission of Jesus in our generation. Not everyone can be an Apostle Paul, but none of us is prohibited from being like the two men that he mentions in this passage. Character, commitment and love are revealed as powerful traits for profitable servants of God. These are the types of people our churches need to send forth.**

## **I. Timothy – A Proven Son (19-23)**

**A. Paul valued Timothy (19-20) – “I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, so that I too may be cheered by news of you. 20 For I have no one like him, who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare.”**

As the Apostle Paul continues from jail to write the Philippian church, he begins to highlight to men that have been by his side, serving him and helping him continue whatever ministry could be accomplished while he is incarcerated. More than anyone else in scripture, Timothy seems to be Paul's truest son in the faith. Two New Testament books are letters which Paul wrote to Timothy toward the end of his life. Paul was used of the Lord to bring Timothy's family into the faith. Timothy, being much younger than Paul, benefitted from Paul's willingness to become a spiritual father to him. As Paul is writing, he states of Timothy that he was a true-hearted believer that shared Paul's genuine love and concern for the Philippian church. It is so tempting for churches to hold on to their best servants. Paul had a different mindset: he was preparing to send his favorite son in the faith to serve the Philippians. Paul wanted to send forth his best co-laborer.

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### **B. Jesus owned Timothy (21) – “For they all seek their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ.”**

This is an indicting statement from Paul. Of all the people that Paul could send, he could not find any who would approach the mission to Philippi in a selfless way. Ministry does nothing to sanctify a person. Paul had multiple people who were ministering to him in Rome, but he noted self-interest in all of them but Timothy (and later, Epaphroditus). To seek one's own interests is to disqualify one from seeking the things which Jesus Christ is seeking to accomplish. Paul looked at young Timothy and discerned the selfless, sacrificial nature of God the Son at work in Timothy's heart.

### **C. Time had proven Timothy (22) – “But you know Timothy's proven worth, how as a son with a father he has served with me in the gospel.”**

Here is a good word for all of us. Paul won Timothy to Jesus Christ. Paul disciplined Timothy. Paul worked alongside Timothy for several years. Yet, Paul would not play favorites. He waited to ensure that Timothy had more than proven himself as a faithful Christian. Not only did Paul know the value of Timothy's life and service, he recognized that others would also affirm this about Timothy. When we are young, we are wise to understand and accept that there are proving seasons that all of us must pass through. The bible cautions against ordaining and releasing young people prematurely into important ministries (1 Tim. 5:22; 1 Tim 3:6). Timothy had passed that test and Paul testified to all of Timothy's proven worth. Paul also highlighted the substantial relational confidence he had in Timothy when he released the spiritual father/son paradigm. In the Church today, God is resurrecting an awareness of spiritual parenting between older Christians and younger ones. Older believers should proactively seek out younger believers in whom they can invest. Younger believers should feel greatly blessed when a wiser, older, more experienced believer offers to pour into them. This is the essence of Paul and Timothy's relationship. In the end, Paul could say that he had proven Timothy and release him in all confidence.

### **D. The Philippians needed Timothy (23) – “I hope therefore to send him just as soon as I see how it will go with me, 24 and I trust in the Lord that shortly I myself will come also.”**

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Paul recognized that the Christians in Philippi stood in need of shepherding in their midst. The small squabbles would turn larger if a leader was not dispatched to help restore calm in the flock. The Philippians may not have felt it was necessary to send Timothy to them. Paul thought otherwise. He planned to dispatch Timothy at the earliest possible convenience.

### **II. Epaphroditus – A Sacrificial Servant (25-30)**

**A. Epaphroditus was exemplary (25) – “I have thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier, and your messenger and minister to my need...”**

1. He was saved - “my brother”
2. He was helpful - “fellow worker”
3. He was committed - “fellow soldier”
4. He was a servant - “your messenger and minister to my need”

Now, Paul mentions another co-laborer who was ministering to him in Rome. Epaphroditus is not as well-known as Timothy, so Paul devotes more words than he did about Timothy in mentioning him here. Obviously, Epaphroditus was saved and a true brother to Paul. He may have been older than Timothy as he is not characterized as a son in the faith to Paul. He was a helpful presence in Paul’s life, doing work on Paul’s behalf that he could not accomplish himself while he was under arrest. Paul also hints about a level of toughness and tenacity in Epaphroditus when he refers to him as a fellow soldier. Christian ministry, if done properly, will be hard work. Difficulties, opposition and daily challenges are part of the recipe for ministry. If we do not maintain a soldier’s mindset, we will be prone to quit at some point. Not Epaphroditus - he was a stout soldier of the cross. Perhaps the most telling thing that Paul mentions about him is that he was willing to serve others. He would serve as a messenger if that is what was needed. The soldier could also be a letter-carrier. He was a servant to both Paul and the Philippian church. He did not regard himself as a superstar but, instead, as a servant.

**B. Epaphroditus was others-focused (26-27) – “...for he has been longing for you all and has been distressed because you heard that he**

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**was ill. 27 Indeed he was ill, near to death. But God had mercy on him, and not only on him but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow.”**

This is amazing. While Epaphroditus fell ill to some unspecified sickness, he was close to dying. There was very little medicinal understanding in those days, and something that could be remedied with a pill or two today actually killed people in Paul's day. Epaphroditus had been close to death. What is amazing is that, while he battled his own illness, his concern was primarily on those whom he knew at Philippi. Epaphroditus was in danger of double-suffering as he struggled physically and then became consumed with the potential sadness that would find others should he happen to die. He seems to be immune from self-pity in his own struggles. He was still making others more important than himself. He eventually recovered as God showed mercy and intervened to bring him healing. What a tremendous reminder and challenge for all of us when we undergo any type of suffering. We can make it all about us or, like Epaphroditus, we can trust God with our own needs as we think upon the needs of others. Amazing!

**C. Epaphroditus was to be honored (28-29) – “I am the more eager to send him, therefore, that you may rejoice at seeing him again, and that I may be less anxious. 29 So receive him in the Lord with all joy, and honor such men...”**

Here we see, again, Paul's willingness to release one of his best co-laborers to go and serve in another place. It might have tempting for Paul to keep a high-caliber leader and servant next to his side in Rome. Yet, Paul was obeying what he wrote earlier in this letter. He considered the needs of others more important than his own needs. Paul was going to send Epaphroditus to Philippi so that they could see he had recovered and so that he might serve the people there. Paul commanded the church in Philippi to receive Epaphroditus with all honor as a faithful ambassador for Christ. We need to be reminded of the mutual honor and appreciation that God expects Christians to shower upon one another. While we are never to worship people, we should be intentionally grateful for those whom God uses in our lives. Leaders should be very thankful for the numerous people who volunteer and serve in the local church while working in the marketplace to earn their living. Church members should seek to stay humbly appreciative of those whom God places in their lives to lead, love and instruct them. Paul called on the church at Philippi to receive Epaphroditus with joy. He was going to travel a

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long way to come and serve them. The last thing that Paul wanted them to do was to respond with a shrug. We must learn to honor and celebrate the value of one another in the Body of Christ.

**D. Epaphroditus was selfless (30) - “...for he nearly died for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete what was lacking in your service to me.”**

Paul’s words about these two men he was sending forth come to an end. He spotlights Epaphroditus’ extreme commitments. In his willingness to risk his life, Epaphroditus reveals that he not only has some of the heart of Paul, he also has the heart of Jesus. May the Lord raise up women and men who are willing to lay it all on the line for the glory of Jesus Christ and the Gospel needs of others. When these types of Christians visibly arise in local congregations, those churches should consider sending them forth to begin or assist in Kingdom works in other places. We cannot send forth the “expendable” among us. If we are to truly reveal that we understand the Great Commission, we should send forth our very best.