

Lesson 12

Living Like Epaphroditus

Philippians 2:25-30

Have you ever heard an important person—perhaps a guest speaker or a new officer—introduced? The remarks are usually delivered in glowing language. Well, today’s assignment introduces us to yet another person who emulated Jesus in sacrificial service. Paul has already pointed us to the supreme example of Jesus’ sacrifice for us. Then Paul, writing from a cell, reported that he was pouring out his life as a sacrifice on top of the sacrifice of the Philippians. Next Paul commended Timothy, his “twin” in the faith, the man whom Paul considered to be likeminded with him. Yes, Timothy sincerely cared for the Philippians and, unlike others who were concerned only about themselves, would make every sacrifice for those in the church at Philippi.

Perhaps...it’s possible...just one

more time...the Philippian readers uttered those two awful words again—“Yes, but...” and then added, “...that’s Timothy! He gets to walk with you, Paul, and talk with you. Just count his many blessings and privileges!” Well, dear one, if this were the case, Paul was up to the challenge. He had one final person for his friends in Philippi to look to for the Christlike behavior of servanthood, and that was a man just like them—Epaphroditus. In fact, Epaphroditus was from their own congregation.

Note the lovely language used by Paul to describe Epaphroditus, whose name means *lovely*, and oh, what a lovely person he was!

Philippians 2:25-30

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

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

²⁷ For indeed he was sick almost unto death; but God had mercy on

him, and not only on him but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow.

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

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

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

Out of God’s Word...

1. How does Paul describe Epaphroditus in relation to...himself (verses 25,30)?

the Philippians (verses 25, 30)?

2. What had been Epaphroditus’s physical condition (verses 26-27), and what had made the difference (verse 27)?

3. What two purposes would sending

Epaphroditus accomplish (verse 28)?

4. What role in Paul's life had Epaphroditus played on behalf of the Philippians (verse 30)?

...and into your heart

- Read again Philippians 2:5-8. How does Epaphroditus exhibit the attitude and mind of Christ?
- Can you follow the "circle of love" drawn in this passage of Scripture?

The Philippians cared for Paul, so ...
The Philippians sent Epaphroditus to assist him.
Epaphroditus, in the course of ministry to Paul, became sick unto death. The Philippians heard about his illness and became worried about Epaphroditus.
Epaphroditus then worried about the Philippians' concerns for him.
Paul cared for the Philippians and Epaphroditus so much that ...
Paul sent Epaphroditus back to the Philippians.

Do you sense the loving care dis-

played here? That's the way it should be in the body of Christ. No matter who we are or what our position, we are called to care, to love, to give, to minister, and to sacrifice. And in that way, everyone benefits!

You see, this "circle of love" was lived out *through* people and to people. The Philippians couldn't go to Paul—but they could send Epaphroditus to him. And Paul couldn't go to the Philippians—but he could send Timothy and Epaphroditus to them. Each of these men was living out the presence and reality of Christ in their lives. Each was living out the admonition of Philippians 2:5, to "let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus." Are you involved in God's "circle of love" when it comes to those closest to you? What can you do today to follow in the steps of Paul, Timothy, and Epaphroditus as you serve others?

- Do you consider yourself to be one of these "lovely" servants of the Lord? Our service may never be performed on the platforms upon which these "stars" let their lights shine for Jesus (2:15). But you, too, are surrounded

by people who need your selfless, Christlike service. Do you perhaps have a husband, young children, married children, grandchildren, parents or in-laws, co-workers, neighbors, and friends who need the loving, sacrificial touch of a Jesus, a Paul, a Timothy, and an Epaphroditus? Why not follow in the steps of our dear Lord and these three faithful disciples? Take on the role of a servant, empty yourself of yourself, humble yourself (2:7-8), and reach out and touch those in your path. "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus" (2:5)! Jot down how you will begin.

Heart Response

I have to admit that I've had the "Yes, but..." thought about this passage myself. But my "Yes, but..." question runs like this: "Yes, but...Paul and Timothy and Epaphroditus were *men!* Is there an example of a *woman* that I might look to?"

Thank the Lord that His Word is filled to overflowing with women who set examples of selfless service!

Just think of Esther, the Shunnamite woman, Priscilla, and Dorcas. (Indeed, such noble women mean so much to me that I've even written a book detailing the sacrifices of more than a hundred of these wonderful women of faith.)

However, on a more contemporary note, meet Amy Carmichael. A single woman and a missionary to India in the late 1800s and early 1900s, this dear lady did not take a break from her mission service for 55 years. No, as the woman who wrote this prayer,

Let me not think to be a clod.
Make me Thy fuel, flame of God,

Amy Carmichael poured out her life for the gospel's sake and for the sake of others. The organization she founded, The Dohnavur Fellowship, provided homes for the young girls and boys she rescued from lives of servitude and shame in Hindu temples.

We too, dear sister, are called to selflessly serve those in our own God-ordained arenas. May you and I find the joy Paul spoke of in verse 17, when he said, "I am glad"; or, as the King James Version of the Bible exults, "If I be offered upon the sacrifice and service

of your faith, I joy, and rejoice with you all."