

## **“Christian Friendships”**

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Scriptural Text: Philippians 2:19-30, ESV

Jesus taught us a great biblical truth when He said, “They will know us by the way we love one another.”<sup>1</sup> In this study we will pick up that theme. We will discover two individuals who particularly demonstrate that kind of humble, selfless, sacrificial love and friendship. We will specifically address the theme of Christian friendships. This could also be the theme, or model, for service, what it means to humble ourselves, and to live according to the interests of others and not only our own interests as we see Paul, Timothy, and Epaphroditus interacting in such a friendship way.

### **Timothy and Epaphroditus**

<sup>19</sup> I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, so that I too may be cheered by news of you. <sup>20</sup> For I have no one like him, who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare. <sup>21</sup> For they all seek their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. <sup>22</sup> But you know Timothy's proven worth, how as a son with a father he has served with me in the gospel. <sup>23</sup> I hope therefore to send him just as soon as I see how it will go with me, <sup>24</sup> and I trust in the Lord that shortly I myself will come also.

<sup>25</sup> 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, <sup>26</sup> for he has been longing for you all and has been distressed because you heard that he was ill. <sup>27</sup> 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. <sup>28</sup> I am the more eager to send him, therefore, that you may rejoice at seeing him again, and that I may be less anxious. <sup>29</sup> So receive him in the Lord with all joy, and honor such men, <sup>30</sup> for he nearly died for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete what was lacking in your service to me.

How have you become the person you now are? If you were to tell me your life story, what details would you include? I imagine if I were to interview ten of you today and ask you to tell me your life story, at least nine of you would include two elements which have shaped your life, and maybe all ten of you would. You would likely tell me about some trials you have experienced in your life which have shaped you and you would likely tell me about some close friends.

Trials and friends, these are the things God uses to shape our lives. I thank God for the trials. James tells us,

<sup>1:2</sup> Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, <sup>3</sup> for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness.

These things shape our lives, they shape us toward Christ, and they shape us into godliness. Charles Spurgeon rightly said, “Glory be to God for the furnace, the hammer, and the file. Heaven shall be all the fuller of bliss because we have been filled with anguish here below and earth shall be better tilled because of our training in adversity.” I like that. He is speaking of God’s workshop in fashioning us. God shapes. He rescues us from ourselves, our sin, and our smallness by the furnace, the hammer, and the file.

I wish God would use other instruments in the workshop. I wish He would use the feather duster, the cotton swab, and the oscillating fan to shape us, but He uses the furnace, the hammer, and the file.

But, He also uses close friends. Were I to tell you how I have become the person I now am, I would tell you of trials and I would tell you of close friends. I would tell you about a mom and a dad who are close friends. I would tell you of brothers and sister and my wife. I would tell you about former pastors and my sons and other earthly friends whom God has given to me in this church and outside this church. God uses spiritual friends to shape us into the image of Jesus.

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<sup>1</sup> John 13:45-35

Friends are so vital to our sanctification. God places these people in our lives to help us out of the slough of despond, to strengthen us when we are imprisoned by the giants in the Castle of Despair, to teach us when darkness shades our path, to correct us when we begin to wander off of the path of God's blessing of faith.<sup>2</sup> These friends may be family members, they may be school teachers, they may be coaches, they may be youth group leaders, they may be neighbors, classmates, teammates, or a host of other roles, but they are friends who connect with us personally and spiritually and they pour grace and truth into our soul. How precious, valuable, and treasured such friendships are.

The truth is, our spiritual growth requires both of these elements: trials and friendships. We need trials which God sends to us to open our hands because we are a small-minded, selfish people and we need trials to open our hands to receive God's best joys and blessings. We need people in our lives who God gives to us to help us walk worthy of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We dare not isolate ourselves from people in the church of Jesus, people whom God has sent to encourage, exhort, rebuke, and strengthen us. We forfeit God's best instruments to help us grow in faith when we refuse to cultivate vital Christian friendships.

While these are both tools God uses to shape us, it is interesting, they are different are they not and we approach them differently. We do not have to pursue trials. We do not have to run after trials in order for us to be blessed by trials. God sends them sovereignly and accordingly along our path. Yet, about people, God would tell us we are to pursue actively friendships within the church of Jesus.

Jesus tells a parable, in Luke 16, about the dishonest manager. He knows he is going to get fired so he begins to go to the debtors and he says,

<sup>5</sup> *"So, summoning his master's debtors one by one, he said to the first, 'How much do you owe my master?'*

<sup>6</sup> *He said, 'A hundred measures of oil.' He said to him, 'Take your bill, and sit down quickly and write fifty.'*

<sup>7</sup> *Then he said to another, 'And how much do you owe?' He said, 'A hundred measures of wheat.' He said to him, 'Take your bill, and write eighty.'"*

At the end of the story, this wicked, unrighteous guy, thinking shrewdly about his future, knows he needs friends. This is the way Jesus ends that parable, in a very surprising way,

<sup>8</sup> *"The master commended the dishonest manager for his shrewdness. For the sons of this world are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than the sons of light. <sup>9</sup> And I tell you, make friends for yourselves by means of unrighteous wealth, so that when it fails they may receive you into the eternal dwellings."*

The idea is: Christian friendships have a value beyond this world. Unrighteous people understand the need for friendships in this world and they do so, often, very selfishly and they use unrighteous wealth to do so. It may be in business when they realize they need to cultivate business partnerships. Unrighteous people recognize that and say, "It is wise for me to have some friends in this world," and they cultivate those friendships. It is really sad when the people of this world are shrewder and wiser about life than the people of God's Kingdom. God's Kingdom people have an eternal perspective and He tells us to use the earthly things which are passing away, treat them as nothing so that we might cultivate friendships which are eternal; friendships which, as a result of our pursuit, some are in the Kingdom because we have loved them and shared the Gospel with them and others are receiving a rich reward because we encouraged them in their faith and we have helped them to connect to God's Kingdom work.

Not all friendships, even between Christians, have eternal value. Some friendships between Christians have very little of Christ in their relationship; Christ is on the periphery of that friendship. The value of Christian friendship depends upon that friendship's deep connection to Christ. We ask the question, "Do I have friendships so deeply connected to Christ, that what we talk about, what we think about together, what we do together, what excites us, what we enjoy together exalts Jesus. Is Christ the center or is He on the surface of our friendship?"

We will ask that question as we look at our text and we will consider six specific characteristics of Christian friendship. We want the kind of friendships which are eternally valuable. The Apostle Paul treasures those friendships God had given to him as he pursues them. Paul works at Christian friendships in the context of the local church. And,

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<sup>2</sup> "The Pilgrim's Progress," John Bunyan, 1678.

this theme of Christian friendship appears in Paul's other letters as well. For instance, in the last chapter of Romans, he will list over thirty-four people by name in Rome to whom he sends greetings,

<sup>16:1</sup> I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a servant of the church at Cenchreae, <sup>2</sup> that you may welcome her in the Lord in a way worthy of the saints, and help her in whatever she may need from you, for she has been a patron of many and of myself as well.

<sup>3</sup> Greet Prisca and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, <sup>4</sup> who risked their necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks but all the churches of the Gentiles give thanks as well. <sup>5</sup> Greet also the church in their house. Greet my beloved Epaphroditus, who was the first convert to Christ in Asia. <sup>6</sup> Greet Mary, who has worked hard for you. <sup>7</sup> Greet Andronicus and Junia, my kinsmen and my fellow prisoners. They are well known to the apostles, and they were in Christ before me. <sup>8</sup> Greet Ampliatus, my beloved in the Lord. <sup>9</sup> Greet Urbanus, our fellow worker in Christ, and my beloved Stachys. <sup>10</sup> Greet Apelles, who is approved in Christ. Greet those who belong to the family of Aristobulus. <sup>11</sup> Greet my kinsman Herodion. Greet those in the Lord who belong to the family of Narcissus. <sup>12</sup> Greet those workers in the Lord, Tryphaena and Tryphosa. Greet the beloved Persis, who has worked hard in the Lord. <sup>13</sup> Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord; also his mother, who has been a mother to me as well. <sup>14</sup> Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas, and the brothers who are with them. <sup>15</sup> Greet Philologus, Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas, and all the saints who are with them.

Friendships are a huge deal to the Apostle Paul.

One element to a Christ-exalting church is Christ-centered friendships within that church. If a church does not have Christ-centered friendships, or have a vibrancy of Christ-centered friendships being created there, then it becomes a very weak and insipid church, unable to shine the Light of the Gospel into a world. Because of that, friendships are so vital for us as a church. I encourage us to commit to the pursuit of deep, Christian friendships in the context of the local church.

Let us consider the context of this study. It really begins in Philippians 1, where the Apostle Paul says,

<sup>27</sup> Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the Gospel. <sup>28</sup> and not frightened in anything by your opponents.

The whole letter flows from this verse. We will find there are two dangers threatening the church and they are two dangers which threaten every church: persecution and opposition from those outside the church, and we see the church in Philippi is experiencing this from Verse 28, but, also, conflict from within the church and relationships beginning to crumble inside the body of Christ.

God calls us back to the Gospel message in order to address both of these problems. God, in His grace, sent us His Son and the Son is victorious over sin and death and over all the opponents of God. We do not need to be fearful in reference to the opposition the world presents to us. We must also remember God's Son loved us and He gives us a new birth into a new family so these relationships we have with Him are bound together as well by the relationships we have with one another. The Gospel brings us back to address these two big issues within the church.

But, more specifically, in reference as to how we treat one another and encourage strong, spiritual relationships within the church, Paul will say,

<sup>2:3</sup> Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.

<sup>4</sup> Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.

Evidently, selfishness and pride consumed the hearts of some of the members of this church in Philippi and they were beginning to act with selfish ambition toward each other and it was destroying the church from within. Beloved, that is a danger for the 21st Century church as well. We begin to isolate ourselves from others. We begin to think about "me" and "mine" and "I" and we do not look our eyes up and say, "There is a whole group of people who come every

Sunday who have needs and God intends for me to connect with them in a real, relational way to minister to them.” The Apostle Paul is telling us to lift up our eyes.

Then he sets Jesus in front of us as a great example,

<sup>2:5</sup> Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, <sup>6</sup> who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, <sup>7</sup> but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. <sup>8</sup> And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. <sup>9</sup> Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, <sup>10</sup> so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, <sup>11</sup> and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

He became one of us to minister to us. If His eyes were only on “Me” and “Mine”, He would have never left the glories of Heaven. He gave God the Father costly obedience in order to minister to us, to love us, and to bless us. As we look at Jesus we say, “Wow, what an example of humility, but I am not Jesus. He is God and I am not God.” The Apostle Paul tells us that is right, but we should still look to Jesus. He is our example. He is the One of whom we are becoming, and Paul sets before us two guys are like us and they reveal to us what humility looks like in the context of relationships and friendships within the church. Through them we can be encouraged that sinners can grow toward Christ-likeness and humility.

Paul sets before the church at Philippi, and before us, Timothy and Epaphroditus. They are weak, frail, and sinful, but we notice how God uses them to build His church. They become models for us of Christian servant hood and of spiritual friendship in the church and they are models we can emulate.

Christian friends can illustrate what faith and action looks like. We need examples and we need models. Christian friends can demonstrate living for Christ in a twisted world is possible.

The first characteristic we will consider of Christian friendships is: **Christian friends become family through faith.** In the Bible, the language of Christian friendship is the language of family,

<sup>19</sup> I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, so that I too may be cheered by news of you. <sup>20</sup> For I have no one like him, who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare. <sup>21</sup> For they all seek their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ.

Notice how Paul is always leaning upon God’s sovereign plan. He wants to send Timothy, but he is leaving the future up to God because God is the One who is in control and Paul and the church need to be at peace with that. The next verse is the one we will consider,

<sup>22</sup> But you know Timothy's proven worth, how as a son with a father he has served with me in the gospel.

Ten or eleven years earlier, Timothy was with Paul when Paul entered Philippi for the first time, when the church was established, and the Gospel was proclaimed. Timothy has been Paul’s companion all through these ten or eleven years and Timothy is absolutely invaluable to Paul as a fellow servant and as a friend. Timothy is much more than a co-laborer, someone who gets the job done, Timothy is like family because Paul describes him “like a son”.

Paul is a Pharisee of Pharisees and a Hebrew of Hebrews.<sup>3</sup> For him to call Timothy, who is half-Gentile, a “son” is remarkable. It indicates something has crossed that barrier that was so natural and ingrained within Paul from the time he was little to call Timothy “a son in the faith”. Three times, in other letters, Paul will talk about Timothy as being “my child”.

<sup>1</sup> Timothy 1:2 To Timothy, my true child in the faith...

This is a very unique relationship, yet it is not unique. It is to be common within the church of Jesus.

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<sup>3</sup> Philippians 3:5

If we skip down, we will see this relationship is also true in Epaphroditus,

<sup>25</sup> I have thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus my brother...

All we know about Epaphroditus is what we learn in this text. He is a non-descript, common guy. He is not a guy who seems to be a leader or elder in the church at Philippi. He is not a guy of necessary, worldly importance. He is just a guy the Philippian church sent to Paul to care for him while he is imprisoned in Rome and Paul describes Epaphroditus as “my brother”.

How is it possible Timothy and Epaphroditus would be considered by Paul as family. It is what Jesus does. When Jesus works in a heart, He brings us into God’s family. John 1 says it this way,

<sup>12</sup> But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God...

In a family we become children of God by faith. We have the same Father and now we, together, are brothers and sisters. Our union in Christ cements us together as family.

The physical family is a special creation of God and I do not want to diminish this physical family in any way. It is right to honor our mother and father. It is right to love our siblings, but we must not diminish the spiritual family as we lift up the physical family. Often times that is what happens. The spiritual family is made of stronger stuff than DNA. The spiritual family is eternal and the physical family is temporary. The physical family rests upon a relationship to our earthly parents while a spiritual family rests upon our relationship to our eternal, heavenly Father.

We discussed this principle earlier in our study, but it good to be reminded of it. Blood is thicker than water, but spirit is thicker than blood. We recall the story from Mark 3, where Jesus comes home to Capernaum and He has been accused of being irrational and out of His mind. His own family is wondering about His mental state. The crowds are gathering around Him and His mother and brother come to find Him. They have to push through the crowds to find Him. Someone comes to Him and says,

<sup>32</sup> And a crowd was sitting around him, and they said to him, “Your mother and your brothers are outside, seeking you.” <sup>33</sup> And he answered them, “*Who are my mother and my brothers?*” <sup>34</sup> And looking about at those who sat around him, he said, “*Here are my mother and my brothers!*” <sup>35</sup> *For whoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister and mother.*”

He is not dishonoring His mother by this, but He is advancing the idea the spiritual family is forged by God’s Spirit for an eternal relationship. Very clearly, God intends for friendships within the family to be strong and united, stronger even than the physical family. Is that our experience, and if not, how can we pursue it?

The second characteristic we consider is: **Christian friendships seek the other’s interest.** This is the primary focus of this chapter,

<sup>4</sup> Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. <sup>5</sup> Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus...

<sup>19</sup> I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon... <sup>20</sup> For I have no one like him...how as a son with a father he has served with me in the gospel.

<sup>25</sup> I have thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier...

We remember that Jesus offers us friendship with Himself by seeking our interests, our good, and our salvation, and by willingly sacrificing Himself in order to seek our interest. That is what Verses 5 through 11 remind us. Then we see that is true with Timothy and Epaphroditus as well.

The principle we learn is: friendships are fueled by giving rather than gaining. People who are searching for friendships in order to give love seldom have a difficulty making friends. That is the truth. If you find someone who says, “I am really out for your interest,” that person finds a host of friends. That is an unusual person and everybody

will be a friend with that person. As we are seeking friends, and if we are having a hard time making friends, God would have us turn our attitude about friendship around so that we say, “The whole purpose of me seeking out friendship is not so they can give me something I need. The whole purpose of my seeking friendship is so that I can give another something they need.”

Instead of asking, “Who will invest in my life as a friend,” we need to ask, “Who can I invest my life in order to be a friend?” We see this attitude of selfless generosity in Epaphroditus and Timothy,

<sup>19</sup> I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon...<sup>20</sup> For I have no one like him, who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare.

Paul is telling the church in Philippi, “When I am able to send him, he is going to minister to your needs.”

We must remember Paul is in prison and he has very few people encouraging him. He has some really strong opponents who are attempting to harm him while he is in prison. Yet, he has two people in all the world who love him and who care for him, Timothy and Epaphroditus. If I am Paul at this point, do you know what I am going to be thinking about as I am in prison? I am going to be thinking about me! I am going to be thinking about how I need people to bring me meals because I cannot go out and get meals. If someone does not bring me meals, I am going to be starving. I need people to bring me a blanket, because if I do not get a blanket I am going to be cold. I need people to come and talk to me because if they do not come and talk to me, I am not going to be able to go to them and I am going to be all alone.

In trials and through pain and suffering we often begin to focus inward. Paul is in the midst of pain and suffering and he is awaiting trial and he may die by execution. Once again, if that were my circumstance, I am thinking about me, “No one else is having any troubles and I am having troubles here. I need someone to come and minister to me.”

Paul has two people, Timothy and Epaphroditus, and do you know what he does? As he is sitting in prison thinking about this dear church in Philippi and his concern for them, because he knows they are being opposed by persecution on the outside and they are being attacked by conflict on the inside, what is he thinking, “Who can I send to them? I can send these two who have been so special to me.”

That does not come naturally to us, does it? But, the Holy Spirit has so worked within the mind of the Apostle Paul to give to him the mind of Christ. Paul is not thinking, “I need to keep these two here because they are the only ones I have and I need somebody.” Paul is thinking, “How can I be a blessing? Maybe I can give the two most treasured things I have, these two friendships, over to this church for their good.”

Timothy is very unique in the way he lives an others-oriented life. Paul knew this about Timothy and he knew when Timothy arrived in Philippi he would not arrive of expectations regarding how the church would care for him. It is a long dusty journey of about eight hundred miles and it takes at least six weeks with good weather to get from Rome to Philippi. Paul knows when Timothy arrives he will not say, “I am here. What hotel will I stay in? What food are you going to feed me?”

No, the moment Timothy arrives, he will hit the ground running, saying, “What can I do to encourage you? Let’s talk. Let me get involved in your lives. Let’s pray together. Let me teach you God’s Truth. Let me teach you God’s Gospel.” Timothy is all about serving. He has their interest as a laser focus and he is willing to devote himself, wholly, to the needs of others in that church.

The journey is going to be risky, costly, and long. There is no consideration of compensation: what will Timothy get out of it? Instead, there is only this driving desire and willingness to exhaust his own self, his resources, his time to bring glory to God by loving and befriending this church.

One commentator writes, “Timothy will be antidote to this spiritual toxemia infecting the Philippians. In his concern for them, they will see a man who seeks not his own interests, but those of Jesus Christ. The interest of Jesus Christ are the welfare of His people. In effect, Paul writes, ‘When I send Timothy to you, you will see his selfless concern for you, the very attitude you should extend to each other.’”

Paul sends Epaphroditus, also,

<sup>25</sup> 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, <sup>26</sup> for he has been longing for you all and has been distressed because you heard that he was ill.

How blessed Paul was to have Epaphroditus and he wants to thank the Philippian church for sending him. Epaphroditus has taken this six week journey, traveling over eight hundred miles, to get to Rome and he willingly does that. He leaves friends, comfort, family, and home in Philippi to go to Rome in order to minister to Paul, a man under arrest by the Roman authorities on the serious charges of sedition, and, perhaps, being executed. This is not a luxury tour of Rome. This is not a visit to the Vatican. This is a man going to Rome, exhausting himself, putting himself in danger for the sake of the dear servant Paul, and he does that. Paul talks about how blessed he is to have an Epaphroditus life.

Yet, Epaphroditus becomes ill and it is serious. He is ill for at least three months. Three times in this passage Paul talks about how he is at the point of death and they thought he was going to die for sure. Epaphroditus starts to get some strength back and this is the first thing he thinks about. My thoughts, in such cases, would be, “I need to rest. I need to take it easy.” Again, that trial would move selfish thoughts even more inward, but not to Epaphroditus. He is not worried about himself or his life or whether or not he was going to make it through this. He is thinking, “The people in Philippi are so worried about me. I do not want them to be worried. I need to get to them in order to encourage them because they are getting all bent up inside for their concern for me.” He is seeking the interest of others.

What a contrast and rebuke these two men are to much of modern Christianity. How easy it is for us to use Gospel language and sing Gospel songs, yet we pursue our own interests. Jesus says, in John 12,

<sup>25</sup> *“Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.”*

How true that is when we apply that verse to friendships. When we give ourselves and look out after the interests of others, we gain. We never lose our life to lose it. We lose our life for the purpose of finding it and gaining it. Jesus promises that is the way the Gospel works.

The third characteristic is: **Christian friends bring encouragement in difficult trials.** This is not merely physical encouragement, but it is encouragement for the soul. Paul is under house arrest in Rome and he is awaiting trial as a result of his Gospel preaching. He does not know whether he is going to be set free or he is going to be executed. But, we read in this passage how sweetly Timothy and Epaphroditus has minister to him and how they have encouraged him, and how he anticipates, when he sends Timothy and Epaphroditus to the church in Philippi, how much encouragement they will be to the church as well.

Interestingly, later in Paul’s life, he will be imprisoned again and this time he will lose his life. The last letter he writes is to Timothy, someone who has been an encouragement to him all of his life. He says, in 2 Timothy,

<sup>4:7</sup> I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. <sup>8</sup> Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing. <sup>9</sup> Do your best to come to me soon. <sup>10</sup> For Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica. Crescens has gone to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia. <sup>11a</sup> Luke alone is with me.

Paul needs the encouragement from Timothy. What a rare treasure it is to find a friend who cares for the interests of others above one’s own and who encourages us. As we think about friendships, we often think, and I know this is where I know my heart goes, what a friend can bring to us, but the Gospel turns that thought upside down and on its head and says, “What can I bring to another person?” As we think about how this characteristic of Christian friendship brings encouragement in difficult trials, we must ask, “How can I be a friend in Christ’s church today to someone who is going through a difficult trial?”

We believe we have our own trials to deal with and we do not know if we have the energy or strength to actually encourage others in their trials because of what we are dealing with in our own. Trials often bend our thoughts and our heart inward. But, here, we look at Paul as he is in prison and he is encouraging others. We look at Epaphroditus and he is on his deathbed, yet he is others-oriented; he is thinking outwardly about encouraging others. God honors us with love when we love. We never lose our life to lose it; we lose our life in order to find it.

The fourth characteristic of Christian friendship is: **Christian friends connect on a spiritual level.** Two Christians who are friends do not necessarily have a Christian friendship. Christian friendships have Christ at the center and they connect through the Spirit.

In Luke we read about how Herod and Pilate became friends with each other after they both interviewed Jesus and sent Him to His execution. Is that not interesting? This conversation they had is not a conversation about the treasure of friendship in general. Is there really much value to the friendship between Herod and Pilate? They connected with each other simply on an earthly plane. They found a political answer to a political problem with each other. They used to not like one another, but now they become friends after the execution of Jesus. This is not a friendship which glorified God and it is not a friendship to have any eternal value.

It is not enough to simply have friends. We need Christian friendships in order to have friendships which are valuable in this life and valuable forever. My concern is, many friendships, even within the church, connect on a similar ground as Herod and Pilate. That is to say, there is not necessarily enmity against Christ, but they are on the ground of mutual, earthly interests. We connect with another person because of politics, social work, athletics, hunting, business, children, cooking, poetry, or a host of other things. We connect purely through mutual, earthly interests, but that is not what Christian friendship is.

Christian friendship may or may not share any other earthly interest. Christian friendships find their power in their shared communion with the Triune God,

<sup>20</sup> For I have no one *else* of kindred spirit who will genuinely be concerned for your welfare.<sup>4</sup>

What are kindred spirits? This is a word which means of equal soul, of like soul. People of kindred spirit communicate on a spiritual level. The communication is not merely horizontal, but it is vertical, also. It is not merely on the surface of life, but it is down deep into the soul-matters of life.

Can you imagine the kind of conversations Paul had with Timothy regarding worship, theology, sharing the Gospel, prayer needs, temptations they face, sins committed and confessed, and faith built. Why should not our friendships talk with the same depth? We need to pursue this because we are naturally superficial, especially us men.

This past week, Jackson and I, our youngest son who is sixteen, wrote topics on little sheets of paper. I was concerned about our relationship, because often times it connects on surface issues. I believed I needed to have deeper conversations with him. We put them in a bowl and several times a week we will pick out a piece of paper from the bowl and we will discuss that topic. He came up with about sixty great topics and I came up with about twenty. We discussed purity of speech one day. We have discussed speaking the truth with others and putting off falsehoods. Interestingly, last night, he picked out, “deepening friendships” and we discussed that. We need to work at communicating at a level of the spirit.

The fifth characteristic of Christian friendship is: **Christian friends strive together for the Gospel.** I believe Christian friendship often times are not realized in the church because we disengage from evangelism. In our text we have Epaphroditus being called a “co-laborer” and “minister”. We have Timothy certainly preaching the Gospel with the Apostle Paul through his life.

Evangelism is meant to be shared together as a church family in order to deepen our relationship with God and with one another. Evangelism is not merely for the purpose of leading others to the Lord, although that is a strongly desired outcome. But even when no one responds positively to the Gospel through our loving proclamation, something really

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<sup>4</sup> New American Standard Bible (NASB)



important has still happened in the church. We have drawn closer to God through it and we have grown closer to each other in it. That is vital.

My son was married this past summer to Kiera and they became friends in college as they went out on the campus, sharing the Gospel with others. Long before they became romantic, there were sharing the Gospel with others, which brought them together. My nephew and his wife, Micah and Jessica, when they were at Moody Bible Institute, that is how they met and became deep friends. Before there was this romantic fire, there was this shared evangelism as they went on the streets of Chicago. Let us pursue evangelism. Evangelism is often times the lost passion of the church.

Finally, **Christian friends sacrifice themselves for Christ's glory**. Christ is always first and we are willing to sacrifice. We read in our text,

<sup>30</sup> for (Epaphroditus) nearly died for the work of Christ, risking his life...

Do we risk our lives for Jesus? I believe Christian friendships will not be realized until we risk our lives together for the sake of the Gospel. C.S. Lewis writes, "When I have learned to love God better than my earthly (friends), I shall love my earthly (friends) better than I do now. In so far as I learn to love my earthly (friends) at the expense of God and instead of God, I shall be moving towards the state in which I shall not love my earthly (friends) at al. When first things are put first, second things are not suppressed, but increased." The idea is not that we will diminish our love, but, rather, as we place these first things before God, we will find in Him a priority that expands our love for one another.

Friendship is bound together always by Christ. That is the reason why the first friendship forged in order to experience the kind of friendship we see in Scripture modeled for us is the friendship with God Himself. Psalm 25 reads,

<sup>14</sup> The friendship of the LORD is for those who fear him, and he makes known to them his covenant.

That is awesome! If we fear the Lord and we humble ourselves before Him, God Himself offers to be our friend. In James 2 we read,

<sup>23</sup> and the Scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness"—and he was called a friend of God.

As we close, I want you to think, first, about being a Christian friend because God's glory is going to be tied in His church to your friendships related to other people in His church. But, also ask yourself, in the very first issue of being a Christian friend is being a friend of God, "Do I know God as my Friend?" Abraham believed God. He looked at the Gospel God was bringing to him and he said, "Yes, I believe Your promises are true," and today we know they are all true all through Jesus Christ. As we place our faith in Him, and as we trust in Him, God brings us into His family. We become His children through faith in Christ, but more, we even become His friend and what a great and awesome privilege it is to have God as our friend.