

Dear Philippians, VIII

Commendable Christians

March 23, 2003

ANCIENT SEA-TRAVEL

This is Iraq ... Philippi ... and Rome where Paul was imprisoned. When Epaphroditus took the Philippians' gifts to Paul, he had to cross the Adriatic Sea on this route. This is the Roman port.

- Sailing was hazardous; Paul was shipwrecked 3 times (2 Cor 11:25).

This is a Merchant ship from Paul's time that was discovered off the coast of Italy in 1980. It's currently being preserved and reconstructed.

PHILIPPIANS 2:19-30

Paul now takes a break from teaching and exhorting to write:

1. A letter of recommendation for Timothy ... who will soon be sailing this route to serve the needs of the Philippians.
2. A letter of commendation for Epaphroditus ... who has been serving the needs of the imprisoned Paul.

19 I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, that I also may be cheered when I receive news about you. 20 I have no one else like him, who takes a genuine interest in your welfare. 21 For everyone looks out for his own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. 22 But you know that Timothy has proved himself, because as a son with his father he has served with me in the work of the gospel. 23 I hope, therefore, to send him as soon as I see how things go with me. 24 And I am confident in the Lord that I myself will come soon. 25 But I think it is necessary to send back to you Epaphroditus, my brother, fellow worker and fellow soldier, who is also your messenger, whom you sent to take care of my needs. 26 For he longs for all of you and is distressed because you heard he was ill. 27 Indeed he was ill, and almost died. But God had mercy on him, and not on him only but also on me, to spare me sorrow upon sorrow. 28 Therefore I am all the more eager to send him, so that when you see him again you may be glad and I may have less anxiety. 29 Welcome him in the Lord with great joy, and honor men like him, 30 because he almost died for the work of Christ, risking his life to make up for the help you could not give me. – Philippians 2:19-30 NIV

RECOMMENDING TIMOTHY

Paul (like Jesus) accepted everyone but chose his friends. And “Tim” and “Pappy” were two of his closest companions. He highly commends both of them and in the process gives us the principles to have and to be a commendable Christian companion.

In referring to his young Apostle Timothy, Paul says:

I have no one else like him, who takes a genuine interest in your welfare. For everyone looks out for his own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. – Philippians 2:20-21 NIV

Timothy was like Pastor Nick; we have no one else who takes as much genuine interest in the welfare of our mission in Calew.

- Nick is an apostle to our church in the Philippines.

Q: Why didn't Paul say, “Everyone looks out for his own interests, not those of others.”

A: Paul is pointing out that Timothy's interest is truly in their spiritual welfare. He may not say or do what you *like*, but he'll definitely say and do what you *need*.

Q: Do you have friends like Timothy in your life?

Q: Do you take a genuine interest in the welfare of others?

Here are three rules concerning genuine interest in others:

1. We must not use others to fulfill our own interests.

There's a reaping and sowing in friendships. People sit back, quiet, introverted, and then complain when nobody embraces them.

You can make more friends in two months by becoming interested in other people than you can in two years by trying to get other people interested in you.
– Dale Carnegie

Q: Do you expect to receive (reap) more than you offer (sow)?

Q: Are you really looking for friends ... or subjects?

We can't just *have* friends; we must *make* them and *invest* in them.

2. We must not assist the misguided interests of others.

It is not commendable to help a friend:

a. Vilify (demonize) someone they're angry with

Whether it's a boss, co-worker, spouse, or parent; a truly sympathetic friend will bring balance and perspective instead of adding to unhealthy and distorted criticism.

b. Justify offensive words or actions

Whether an offense was aimed at us or others, a truly supportive friend will gently challenge and hold accountable rather than stuff personal hurts, or excuse the hurting of another.

c. Numb any pain or wound that needs attention

A classic movie line, when one guy sees his buddy suffering emotional pain (i.e. getting fired, romantic break-up): "Let's go get drunk!" Or, "You're better off without her."

A truly compassionate friend helps face, acknowledge, and work through heartache, rather than avoid, marginalize, or deny it. Always ask: "Is this something Jesus would do for them?" If it isn't, we'll ultimately be hurting them by our involvement (i.e. lying to cover up a friend's marital affair).

3. We must take interest in the restoration of others.

We need friends so we can share our joys, sorrows, and everyday events. But Christian friendship goes a step beyond this:

- The goal is growth in Christ on the part of both parties.

Being honest without jeopardizing a relationship is a fragile balance. But, it tends to happen quite naturally when people can honestly express their hearts to someone whose only agenda is:

- To listen, understand, and appreciate the circumstances.
- To lend a sense of support and care with their presence.
- To encourage with gentle reminders of God's sufficiency.
- To respond with resources, aid, perspective, and wisdom.

We're often tempted to leap-frog to the last step. We feel pressure to bring a quick solution to the situation.

- Our first goal should not be to cure but to care

Epaphroditus' name suggests his parents had devoted him to Aphrodite, the goddess of love and the patron of gambling; the highest roll of the dice was called "Epaphroditus".

Epaphroditus had risked (gambled) his life to join Paul. Hazards of sea travel, illness, carrying moneys on robber-laden roads.

But I think it is necessary to send back to you Epaphroditus, my **brother, fellow worker** and **fellow soldier**, who is also your **messenger**, whom you sent to take **care** of my needs. For he longs for all of you and is **distressed** because you heard he was ill. – Philippians 2:25-26 NIV

Timothy was like a son (Vs 22), Epaphroditus a **brother**. Perhaps Epaphroditus was closer to Paul's age. These terms reflect a deep sense of companionship. According to Paul, Epaphroditus as a commendable companion had it all:

Epaphroditus was like a **fellow worker**; commendables are those who "work" together toward a common mission of righteousness.

Epaphroditus was like a **fellow soldier**; commendables are those who "fight" together against a common enemy of unrighteousness.

Epaphroditus was a **messenger**; one who brings the intangibles of love, affection, and encouragement on behalf of someone else.

- Commendables are messengers of Christ through their words.

Epaphroditus was a **caregiver**; one who brings the tangibles of attention, provision, and assistance on behalf of someone else.

- Commendables are caregivers of Christ through their actions.

Epaphroditus was **distressed**. He's so other-centered, he's more concerned with his friend's emotional well-being than his own physical condition.

- Commendables always consider the impact their decisions, conduct, and circumstances are having on others.

Therefore I am all the more eager to send him, so that when you see him again you may be glad and I may have less **anxiety**. Welcome him in the Lord with great **joy**, and **honor** men like him, because he almost died for the work of Christ, **risking** his life to make up for the help you could not give me. – *Philippians 2:28-30 NIV*

True friendship brings with it: **anxiety, joy, honor, and risk**. Sharing heartaches as well as triumphs and victories; being frustrated by bad decisions and admiring good ones; and always sacrificing part of your welfare for the welfare of others ...

Anxiety, joy, honor, and risk are the price and the reward for engaging emotionally with others as a true friend and a commendable Christian.