

Model Servants

Philippians 2:19-30

If you're not a Christian, you may have various thoughts about Christians. Maybe you've been turned off by phony religiosity of people who say they're Christians. Maybe you've detected nothing different in their lives compared to yours. I want you to look at some better examples in this passage. Here we see the type of believers that we're supposed to be like. Don't reject Christ and the church based on a poor representation from those who, in the words of Bonhoeffer, embrace "cheap grace." That is, those who claim the name *Christian*, but seem no different from anyone else. Take a look at an authentic version of Christianity in these two men here in Philippians, who have been radically transformed by God's saving grace in Christ.

At first glance verses 19-30 are a bit of a downer. C.J. Mahaney quips, "No one's favorite verse is found in this passage!" ("Whom Do you Follow?"). Paul opens the letter with a heart stirring thanksgiving and prayer. He proceeds with his inspiring Christ-centered ambition and vision described in 1:12-26. Next, he moves into the weighty exhortation of the letter, challenging the Philippians to "live worthy of the Gospel" (1:27). This weighty exhortation is followed by a plea for unity that comes through humility (1:27b-2:4). Paul illustrates what humble mindset looks like with the motivating and majestic Christ hymn of Philippians 2:5-11. Then after commanding the Philippians in 2:12, to "work out their salvation with fear and trembling" by doing "everything without grumbling and arguing" (2:14), Paul describes his own inspiring example of being "poured out like a drink offering" (2:17-18). In chapters 3-4, we read of more popular and powerful passages. But in before we get to chapter 3, we find ... a travel itinerary? Seriously? Should we just skip this and move on to Paul talking about our union with Christ and what it means to live in the power of the resurrection (3:10)? Should we just skip over to Philippians 4:6-7 and learn about how we might have the peace of God? We could do that, but we would by pass some important material. For this passage is calling us to Christ-likeness. We need to consider it carefully.

Understanding the Importance of the Travelogue

To see the importance of this passage, consider two questions. First, why do we have a travel itinerary at all? This is probably obvious to you, but I'll mention it. Paul includes this section because communication was important. He didn't have access to technological advances like Skype, email, cell phones, or FaceTime. The church was supporting Paul, and Paul wanted to extend thanks to the church and outline his plans.

Further, Epaphroditus, who delivered a gift to Paul, was being sent back to Philippi sooner rather than later, and Timothy was being sent later rather than sooner. Paul needed to alert the church to these dynamics.

Second, why is this travel itinerary in the middle of the book? While there are exceptions (as in 1 Cor 4:1-19), the travelogue is usually at the end of the book. For example, at the end of Colossians 4, Paul says, "Tychicus will tell you all about my activities ... I have sent him to you for this purpose...." (Col 4:7-ff). Because of this unusual placement in Philippians 2, some have concluded that Philippians is more than one letter. But I don't think that's the best answer. The best reason for including this travelogue here is because it fits perfectly within the flow of the whole letter. By speaking about Timothy and Epaphroditus, Paul provides concrete examples of what he's been talking about in the previous two chapters.

And this is why this passage lays claim on our lives. Paul moves from *instructions* and *imperatives* to *living illustrations*. We need illustrations/examples of a book-of-Philippians type of life! D.A Carson gives numerous examples of the need for examples (in matters such as prayer, language, lifestyle, entertainment), and says, "much Christian character is as much caught as taught -- that is, it is picked up by constant association with mature Christians.... Modeling, modeling; it takes place all the time, whether we take it into account or not" (69-70).

These men exemplify Philippians 1:5, for they were "partners in the Gospel." God began a good work in them, and He was carrying it out (1:6). These men show us what it looks like to have affection for Christ's church (cf., Phil 1:7-8). We could also say that they illustrate what it looks like to live "worthy of the Gospel" (1:27), and that they illustrate the imperatives of Phil 2:12-16. The most obvious text that should come to our minds is found here in the immediate context:

Do nothing out of rivalry or conceit, but in humility consider others as more important than yourselves. Everyone should look not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others. (Phil 2:3-4)

Timothy and Epaphroditus are humble, others-focused servants, who provide a shining example of working out your salvation in practical acts of serving without grumbling (2:12-14). Remember that we said "JOY" comes when you get things in the right order: "Jesus, then Others, then, Yourself." As a student said, there's a "whole lot of JO in this passage!" These two men love Jesus and others. We shouldn't elevate them beyond reason, but we must see them as Paul is using them - as examples worth watching and as men worth following.

As we read through the text we should seek to *imitate* such servants. We should seek to *honor* such servants (2:29). We should seek to *send* such servants, or *go* like these servants. Regarding imitation, we should say "Imitate them, as they follow after the example that is in Jesus" (2:5-11, cf., 3:17). Regarding honor, we're reminded of the need to show appreciation and respect for those that build up Christ's church. Regarding going/sending, we see the need to send our best, and to be ready and available to go serve others ourselves.

So there's more than a travel itinerary here. Paul commends the character of these two brothers. He holds them up as model servants. Practically, brothers show us what it looks like to have a changed heart. Jesus transformed them into compassionate, self-forgetful, sacrificial servants, who are worthy of emulation. When a church like the one in Phillipi, or a church today, follows such selfless examples, they will grow united (Phil 1:27-2:4).

What about the person who reads this section and say, "It's kind of mundane." We could say, "Indeed, you won't find anything super-sensational here, and that's probably why you need to read it closely!" There are no light shows, mega conferences, or acrobatic stunts here. There are no hobbits disappearing or chihuahuas doing tricks. But faithful Christian living doesn't always look extraordinary. We are drawn to the dramatic. The church gets sucked in to the extraordinary as a product of the culture, in which everything gets sensationalized around us -- even the nightly weather report is often sensationalized! As a result of our addiction to sensationalism we get bored easily, we can't be still and study or listen, and we tend to downplay faithful, normal Christian service that honors Jesus. God normally meets us and uses us in the ordinariness of life.

Let me use an illustrate. Fred Craddock once said the following:

To give my life for Christ appears glorious. To pour myself out for others ... to pay the ultimate price of martyrdom—I'll do it. I'm ready, Lord, to go out in a blaze of glory.... We think giving our all to the Lord is like taking \$1,000 bill and laying it on the table —'Here's my life, Lord. I'm giving it all.' But the reality for most of us is that he sends us to the bank and has us cash in the \$1,000 for quarters. We go through life putting out 25 cents here and 50 cents there. Listen to the neighbor kid's troubles instead of saying, 'Get lost.' Go to a committee meeting. Give a cup of water to a shaky old man in a nursing home. Usually giving our life to Christ isn't glorious. It's done in all those little acts of love, 25 cents at a time. It would

be easy to go out in a flash of glory; it's harder to live the Christian life little by little over the long haul." (Taken from *Leadership Magazine*, Vol. 5, No. 4)

Faithful Christian living might mean martyrdom for some, and if so, then we should rightly honor that believer. But for many others, those like Epaphroditus, faithful Christian living involves pouring our lives out, little by little, in practical acts of service over the long haul. It involves "giving out quarters every day": having a lonely person over for dinner; babysitting for a single mother; inviting some international students over; doing foster care; praying with a friend; helping someone move; visiting those in the hospital; and so on. This passage in Philippians 2 involves a guy delivering a gift to Paul and getting sick along the way. Paul says essentially, that he spent some quarters, and should be honored.

So let's look at the examples of Timothy and Epaphroditus (whom I would like call them "Timbo" and "Aprhro, but I'll refrain!). Let's consider how we might imitate them, honor others like them, and go like them or send others like them.

The Example of Timothy (2:19-24)

In verse 19, Paul tells the church that he's not sending Timothy right away. Maybe the church was expecting him to come soon. Timothy might be waiting until planned Paul's trial is concluded (23). If the verdict is favorable, then Paul plans on coming shortly after Timothy gets deployed (24).

Notice that Paul is not certain about everything, and recognizes that he is subject to God's will, as indicated by the phrase, "I hope in the Lord Jesus" (19a, cf., 24). In his travels, he knows that Jesus is Lord over all things. In between this itinerary, you will notice a heart-felt commendation of Timothy.

Now I hope in the Lord Jesus a to send Timothy to you soon so that I also may be encouraged when I hear news about you. For I have no one else like-minded who will genuinely care about your interests; all seek their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. But you know his proven character, because he has served with me in the gospel ministry like a son with a father. Therefore, I hope to send him as soon as I see how things go with me. I am convinced in the Lord that I myself will also come quickly. (2:19-24)

Consider two aspects of Timothy's example: (1) his compassion, and (2) his companionship.

Timothy's Compassion (20-21)

Paul says that has "no one else like-minded" as Timothy (20a). Of course, Paul knows other believers in Rome, but no one is quite like Timothy in attitude, character, and closeness to the apostle. Apparently, Luke or Aristarchus are no longer with him in Rome (cf., Col. 4:10, 14; Phm. 24).

What makes Timothy special among those present? Paul says that *Timothy genuinely cares about others* (20b). Timothy is truly concerned for the well-being of others. He is a compassionate servant, who loves the church. Like Paul, Timothy has a concern for the health of churches (2 Cor 11:28).

Paul says that many others seek "their own interests" (21). Already in chapters 1 and 2, Paul mentioned that some in Rome served out of envy and rivalry (1:15, 17; cf., 2:3). But Timothy is in the group that served Christ out of goodwill and love (1:15-16).

Notice the shift from verse 20 to verse 21. In verse 20, Paul says that Timothy is concerned for "your interests," and in verse 21, he says that he seeks after the interests "of Christ." Serving Christ involves serving others in the church. Serving Christ's church flows from our love for others and Jesus's glory, not our own selfish agendas.

By highlighting the warm, selfless, Christ-centered character of Timothy, Paul might also be preparing the congregation to listen to his son in the faith. Remember there are tensions in Philippi. Paul informs the church that Timothy is the type of guy that they can trust and listen to, in order to resolve the matter. They can be assured that Timothy won't serve with self-centered motives, but will serve the interests of Christ, who longs for unity in His church (21). Timothy's arrival will be worth the wait (O'Brien).

Let us pursue the same type of compassion that flows from a heart enthralled by Jesus. Don't serve for the admiration of others, but for the adoration of Christ. Serve out of compassion for people, not to make a name for yourself. Let us humbly seek the good of others, in light of how Jesus has poured out His life for us.

Throughout the years, the church has had many shining examples of selfless, Christ-exalting service. For instance, in 252, historians tell us that a plague hit Carthage, and people were leaving the city for the threat of contamination and losing everything. The Christian leader, Cyprian, drew all the Christian leaders together in the middle of the town – in a town that persecuted Christians and blamed them for the problems – and said, "Fan out through this town to give to all according to their need." And they would not abandon the city in the mist of the plague. The Christians earned a reputation for showing charity to all people regardless of people's status or background.

What kind of leader do you follow? What kind of leader will you be? Follow compassionate servant-leaders who are following Christ, like Timothy. Listen to these types of leaders. Hear their heart. Watch their lives. And if you become a leader, be this type of leader. Don't insist on the finest accommodations. Don't become self-absorbed. Don't live for the admiration of others. Look on the interest in others for the glory of Christ.

Timothy's Companionship (22-24)

Next, Paul says, "But you know his proven character, because he has served with me in the gospel ministry like a son with a father." Paul loves Timothy as a spiritual son (cf., 1 Cor 4:17; 2 Tim 1:2; 2 Ki 2:12). His words about Timothy highlights the familial nature of the church. Timothy wasn't merely a volunteer in an organization. He is Paul's son in the faith.

Paul mentions that Timothy had "proven his character" to others (22). He was devoted to Christ's cause and Christ's church. Together, Paul and Timothy they were "servants of Christ Jesus" (1:1). They had been through the fire of testing and trial, advancing of the Gospel in the midst of hardship. (cf. Acts 16:1, 3; 17:14)

The striking note about the loyal companionship of Timothy is highlighted in the next verse: "Therefore, I hope to send him as soon as I see how things go with me" (23). Paul couldn't dispatch Timothy immediately. Perhaps he needed his help in a legal or pastoral matter. We don't know. What is clear is that Paul treasured Timothy's companionship. Timothy was a true friend that helped sustain the apostle during this time.

Are you a friend like this? Do you have friends like this? What made Timothy a great friend? The best friends are those that serve and care for you like Christ would serve and care for you. Do you have friends like that? I hope you do. Are you a friend like that? Then care for them as Christ would care for them. That means being present, speaking the truth, strengthening them in weakness, praying for them, and providing support and resources when needed.

So Paul is sending Timothy, his spiritual son, his companion, his fellow servant in the Gospel. He was an extension of Paul to minister to the Philippians. In sending Timothy to the church, Paul is also displaying selfless service. He is sending his beloved companion for the good of others. Paul too is an example of self-less service that we should emulate.

The Example of Epaphroditus (2:25-30)

Paul isn't sending Timothy immediately, but he is sending Epaphroditus. The name "Epaphroditus" is derived from "Aphrodite" (the Greek mythical goddess), which was common in the era. His family may have worshiped this goddess, and he was likely a Gentile convert (O'Brien). What happens when Jesus transforms an idol worshiper? We read about it here. (He shouldn't be confused with Epaphras [cf., Col 4:12]). Paul says:

But I considered it necessary to send you Epaphroditus —my brother, coworker, and fellow soldier, as well as your messenger and minister to my need — since he has been longing for all of you and was distressed because you heard that he was sick. Indeed, he was so sick that he nearly died. However, God had mercy on him, and not only on him but also on me, so that I would not have one grief on top of another. For this reason, I am very eager to send him so that you may rejoice when you see him again and I may be less anxious. Therefore, welcome him in the Lord with all joy and hold men like him in honor, because he came close to death for the work of Christ, risking his life to make up what was lacking in your ministry to me. (2:25-30)

According to chapter 4, Epaphroditus brought Paul financial help from the church. The church probably expected Epaphroditus to stay and minister to Paul. But Paul tells them that he's sending him back because Epaphroditus had fallen ill. We don't know what this illness was, perhaps it was a terrible fever, or the flu. Whatever it was, he almost died.

The events may have happened like this. He probably got sick while in route, not after his arrival in Rome. Since Epaphroditus was carrying money, he probably didn't travel alone (cf., 2 Cor 8:16-22). One of the companions may have returned to the Philippian church with the alarming news, or someone traveling in the opposite direction could have reported the situation to the church (Witherington, 80). Then, one of his companions may have nursed him along as they journeyed to deliver the gift (see Hughes).

Paul wanted the church to welcome and honor Epaphroditus. Kent Hughes claims he was a "layman" not an official leader in the church. Indeed, no position is mentioned neither here nor in chapter 4. It's certainly true that you don't have to have a position to be useful or worthy of honor. Paul also wanted to send him because he didn't want the additional stress of having him with him in Rome.

Why the emphasis on *honor*? This emphasis is probably due to the fact that this was a culture based more on honor and shame than our American culture is. Think

about it. The church sends their representative to the famous apostle. When he arrives, he gets sick and almost dies, and has to go home sooner rather than later. The church might think of him as an embarrassment. "We should have sent someone else!" they may have thought. But Paul covers for him, and says he deserves a hero's welcome.

Paul mentions five descriptions for Epaphroditus that underscore his character and partnership. The first descriptions relate to his relationship with Paul, and the next two descriptions note his relationship to the Philippians. Then he mentions the compassion of Epaphroditus, his experience of God's restoring mercy, and the type of welcome he deserves when he returns to the church.

The Type of Guy He Was (2:25)

Brother. This first description reminds us how we become partners in the Gospel. Through Christ, we have been adopted by the Father. And when you become a Christian, not only do you have a new relationship with God, you also get a new relationship with other believers. You are now brothers and sisters. The term "brother" may not mean much to you if you grew up in a church where you heard it regularly. Often times Christians use the term because they can't remember each other's names! But it's a miracle that we're brothers and sisters. Our identity has changed. God is our Father, and we are adopted family members.

In calling him "brother" Paul is also highlighting his affection for Epaphroditus, not just this identity change. When you go through hard times with a Christian brother or sister at your side, you form a deep relationship with them. Such was the case here. Praise God for brothers and sisters in Christ.

Coworker. Paul also labored in the same mission as Epaphroditus. Even though Paul was more up front, and was in great position of leadership, he recognized that they were equals. Paul didn't assume some position of superiority. They worked together in the cause of Christ. Epaphroditus, you could say nearly "worked himself to death."

Fellow Soldier. Paul changes the image to one of his favorite pictures of the Christian life. He goes to the battlefield and calls him a "fellow soldier" (2 Tim 2:3-4). He and Epaphroditus had been through a spiritual war together (cf., Eph 6:10-20). As in the case with the term "coworker" Paul sees himself as an equal, on the same mission together. As many good soldiers, Epaphroditus had been wounded, and was being sent home to rest (Hughes).

Messenger and Minister. Moving from their relationship with each other, Paul mentions the relationship between Epaphroditus and the Philippians. With two words he

explains what Epaphroditus was called to do. He was their "messenger" (*apostolon*). Like the Apostle Paul, he was "sent" with a mission to convey the love of the church and to give a gift to Paul. And he was also their "minister" (*leitourgon*), a word that carries the idea of priestly service in the Greek version of the Old Testament. This term doesn't refer to a position, but a particular function, for all believers are God's priests. And all believers are called to worship God through sacrificial service (Rom 12:1-2). Epaphroditus worshiped God by serving Paul and others. While it's good to discuss various aspects of corporate worship, we shouldn't limit our discussion of worship to merely what happens on Sunday. We need worshipers like Epaphroditus.

Wouldn't these five terms be wonderful on a tombstone? Wouldn't you like to be known as a brother, a coworker, a fellow soldier, a messenger, and minister? What would people say should go on your tombstone? Emulate Epaphroditus.

The Type Love He Displayed (2:26)

Epaphroditus' compassionate sensitivity is noted in the next phrase, "since he has been longing for all of you and was *distressed* because you heard that he was sick" (2:26, my emphasis). What is remarkable about this verse is that Epaphroditus is the one who is sick, yet we don't read of any self-pity. Quite the opposite! He's not concerned about himself; he's concerned about the the anxiety of the Philippians! I must admit that this is a challenging example. When you get sick, do you turn inward? Do you want to call your mom and have her make chicken soup? Well, this is much worse than the common flu. Yet, Epaphroditus is "looking onto the interests of others" even in his sickness (Phil 2:4)

The word for "distress" is only used elsewhere in the garden of Gethsemene passage, describing great anguish of our Lord prior to His death (Mt. 26:37; Mk. 14:33). Even with death at his doorstep, Epaphroditus, like Jesus, is concerned about others more than himself. Jesus was obedient to death (2:8); Epaphroditus was obedient to the point of death (2:27). Yet another way Epaphroditus points us to Jesus.

Perhaps someone has asked you, "As a Christian, what's different about your life compared to mine?" You could stop and teach them theology. But you could also say, "Come watch me live for a month, and you can tell me. See if there's anything different." In Philippians 2:5-11 we see the theology of a Christian, but in Philippians 2:19-30, we see the type of lifestyle that should mark a genuine Christian. Would someone see a Epaphroditus type of love in you if they watched your life for a month? To live this type of life, we need help (2 Cor 12). That's exactly what Epaphroditus received.

The Type of Help He Needed (27)

Just how sick was he? Paul says that he was so sick that he "nearly died" (27a). Three times Paul mentions his severe condition (27, 28, 30).

How did Paul's fellow soldier survive? We don't have all of the details. But we do know this: "God had mercy on him" (27b). Did medicine help to cure him? Was he restored as a result of prayer? Did he experience a divine miracle apart from medicine? Was it a combination of all of these? We don't know. The significant thing to Paul was that his recovery was due to the sovereign act of a merciful God (O'Brien). Epaphroditus needed God's mercy in his weakness.

Paul adds that he too had experienced the mercy of God (27c). If Epaphroditus would have died, Paul would have had "sorrow upon sorrow." (27d). Even though Paul knows that "to die is gain" (1:21b, ESV), this doesn't mean we wouldn't mourn over his brother.

Our world is filled with sorrow, but the believer can say with Paul, we are "sorrowful, yet always rejoicing" (2 Cor 6:10a, ESV). Paul would have wept over Epaphroditus. He wasn't an emotionless leader. This passage shows how much he loves people, and when you love people, you grieve over their absence. But we don't grieve as those without hope. (cf., 1 Thess 4:13)

Does this little phrase, "But God had mercy on him" move you? His mercies are new every morning (Lam 3:22). And we need new mercies every morning! We experience God's mercy in manifold ways. In His mercy He has covered our sin, and in His mercy he heals our bodies (Ps 103:1-5). Believers rejoice in the saving mercy of God, who has raised us up spiritually ("But God being rich in mercy," Eph 2:4). We experience traveling mercies regularly. David said it well, "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life" (Ps 23:6). God had been good to Paul, Epaphroditus and to the church in Philippi. And he's been good to us. May God fill your heart with gratitude for His bountiful mercies; and may your heart not be filled with entitlement. For we don't deserve such blessings.

The Type of Welcome He Deserved (28-30)

In verse 28, Paul says that he's eager to send Epaphroditus back to the Philippians in order that everyone may experience peace. Paul wouldn't have to worry

about him. The church would know that he was okay. And Epaphroditus wouldn't have to worry about the Philippians worrying!

Upon arrival, Paul says that there should not only be joy, love, and peace, but there should also be *honor* (29). Paul commands the church to welcome their messenger because he made a huge sacrifice. Paul says of him that he "risked his life to complete what was lacking in your service to me" (30, ESV). What was lacking was the Philippians' presence. Epaphroditus represented them in their absence. In so doing, he almost died. He deserves to be welcomed, as Christ will welcome who faithfully labor in service to others (cf., Matt 25:14-46).

This command to honor Epaphroditus is so refreshing. In Paul's day, and our day, it's usually the famous, the talented, and the powerful that are praised. But here's a simple messenger who took a gift to Paul in humble service and sacrifice, and Paul says "honor him."

Similar language is found in 1 Corinthians. 16:15–18, where Paul commends Stephanas and his family.

*Brothers, you know the household of Stephanas: They are the firstfruits of Achaia and have devoted themselves to serving the saints. I urge you also to submit to such people, and to everyone who works and labors with them. I am pleased to have Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus present, because **these men have made up for your absence**. For they have refreshed my spirit and yours. Therefore **recognize such people**.* (1 Cor 16:15-18, my emphasis)

Sounds a lot like Epaphroditus doesn't it? O'Brien notes, "Paul's teaching in both passages [Phil 2:25-30; 1 Cor 16:15-18] is consistent with that of Jesus, who said that the greatest honor among his followers belongs to the one who renders the lowliest service (Mk 10:42–45; Lk 22:24–27; cf. Jn. 13:13–15)" (O'Brien,).

I (Tony) am a Kentucky basketball fan. This past year we made it to the championship game, only to lose to Connecticut. Almost 80,000 people showed up to watch that game. When Kentucky returned from the airport during their wins, they were extolled by fans. When they returned to Rupp Arena after their defeat in the finals, fans congratulated them on a great season. I don't have a problem with fans honoring players. But unfortunately, we fail to recognize the type of greatness exemplified in Epaphroditus. We underestimate faithful service to Jesus. What's greater, serving the least of these, or winning a championship? Sports are wonderful gifts, but games are games. There are much more important battles to engage. When you see someone

serving Christ faithfully, you should encourage them and thank them. Don't deify them. But honor them. Paul says this guy is worthy of a appreciative and thoughtful welcome. The Christian life should be filled with honoring one another (cf., 1 Tim 5:3, 17, 6:1; Rom 12:10; 1 Pet 2:17; Heb 13:4a; Eph 6:2). Ultimate honor goes to Jesus, but under that honor, we should have deep appreciation for the hard work of those that build up Christ's church.

Let's step back and gather a few profitable points of application from the life of Epaphroditus.

First, serving Jesus and others will cost you, but it's worth it! The call to put the needs of others above your own, will mean that you might have to change your schedule this week. You might have to travel somewhere. You might get sick along your journey, and have to minister in weakness. You might have to open your home, or your wallet. You might encounter great conflict or persecution. If we're going to follow after these model servants, who are following Jesus' example, then we must see that the Christian life involves sacrifice -- varying degrees of sacrifice. But it's worth it. It's worth it because we get to bless others, and because it glorifies Jesus, who notices every small act of obedience, and will reward it (cf., Matt 25:14-46; Luke 14:12-14).

Secondly, deep relationships are formed when you are on mission with other brothers and sisters. We're made for relationships -- not superficial relationships based on fleeting affinities. We're made for something much deeper, namely Gospel partnerships. We have pointed out already that the "fellowship of the Gospel" (Phil 1:5) involves more than potluck dinners. It involves a common mission of advancing the Gospel. These two servants were co-workers with Paul, and as a result they shared a deep relationship that few experience. Let's remember this. Deep and abiding community is formed in the church, as we serve together, not just when we sit in a Bible study together, or just as we sit in a worship event once a week together (as important as these are!).

Finally, the church has always been sustained, enriched, and built up by unsung heroes. Maybe not exclusively blessed and sustained by unsung heroes, but perhaps predominantly by unsung heroes (Begg). Follow after their example, and recognize their importance.

Consider Romans 16. This particular postscript includes a list of "unsung heroes." These postscripts, like the one in 1 Cor 16, demonstrates that Paul didn't just love books, theology, and ministry. He also loved people. When Paul talks about unsung heroes in the church, he does so with very honorable and familial language, like he does with Timothy and Epaphroditus. I have highlighted a few of the ways that Paul honors them:

1 I commend to you **our sister** Phoebe, who is a **servant** of the church in Cenchreae.
2 So you should welcome her in the Lord in a manner worthy of the saints and assist her in whatever matter she may require your help. For indeed she has been a benefactor of many—and of me also.

3 Give my greetings to Prisca and Aquila, I **my coworkers** in m Christ Jesus, 4 who **risked their own necks for my life**. Not only do I thank them, but so do all the Gentile churches.

5 Greet also the church that meets in their home.

Greet my **dear friend** Epaeetus, who is the first convert to Christ from Asia.

6 Greet Mary, who has **worked very hard for you**.

7 Greet Andronicus and Junia, my **fellow countrymen** and **fellow prisoners**. They are noteworthy in the eyes of the apostles, and they were also in Christ before me.

8 Greet Ampliatus, my **dear friend** in the Lord.

9 Greet Urbanus, our **coworker** in Christ, and my **dear friend** Stachys.

10 Greet Apelles, who is **approved** in Christ.

Greet those who belong to the household of Aristobulus.

11 Greet Herodion, my **fellow countryman**.

Greet those who belong to the household of Narcissus who are in the Lord.

12 Greet Tryphaena and Tryphosa, who have **worked hard** in the Lord.

Greet my dear friend Persis, who has **worked very hard** in the Lord.

13 Greet Rufus, chosen in the Lord; also his mother—and **mine**.

14 Greet Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas, and **the brothers** who are with them.

15 Greet Philologus and Julia, Nereus and his sister, and Olympas, and all the saints who are with them.

16 Greet one another with a holy kiss.

All the churches of Christ send you greetings. (Romans 16:1-16)

Those are some beautiful words -- "brother," "mother," "sister," "co-worker," "servant," those who "worked very hard..." Let me ask you, based upon all of these names, did the apostles do all the work in the church? No. Were they the only people worthy of honor? No. The church was filled with missionaries; with fellow servants of Jesus, who were laboring in their own ways to build up the church and reach out in mission. So, don't get the impression that you don't have an important role to play in your church. You do! The church has been blessed throughout the centuries by unsung heroes like these.

In Humility, Consider Others More Significant Than Yourself

Timothy and Epaphroditus (and Paul!) give us living examples of the book of Philippians in general, and Philippians 2:3-4 in particular. To summarize, let me repeat Paul's exhortation: "Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves" (ESV). All three men show us what happens when the Gospel really transforms us from the inside out, we begin to live like Jesus (2:5-11).

What about you? Is this the nature of your Christian life - a life of considering the needs of others above your own. The only way that happens is by trusting in Christ, who emptied Himself on behalf of sinful people like us, and by the Spirit, pursuing this attitude and these types of actions. Actions that include every day acts of love, little by little, over the long haul. Go spend some quarters today for the good of others and the glory of Jesus in the ordinariness of life.