

# Joy in Service

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 28 September 2025

Preacher: Jonathan de Groot

[ 0 : 00 ] We come now to God's Word in the New Testament letter of Philippians, Philippians chapter 2. It's page 1179 in the church Bibles. If you don't have a Bible, then do pick up one in the seat in front.

Page 1179, and we're reading Philippians chapter 2, verse 19 to 30. Philippians 2, 19 to 30, and the reading is also up on the screen.

This is the Word of God. I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, that I also may be cheered when I receive news about you.

I have no one else like him who will show genuine concern for your welfare. For everyone looks out for their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ.

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. I hope, therefore, to send him as soon as I see how things go with me.

[ 1 : 13 ] And I am confident in the Lord that I myself will come soon. But I think it is necessary to send back to you Epaphroditus, my brother, co-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. 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.

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. So then, welcome him in the Lord with great joy, and honor people like him, because he almost died for the work of Christ.

He risked his life to make up for the help you yourselves could not give me. Amen. Well, do keep your Bible open, and let me pray and ask for God's help as we look at these verses together.

Our God, we thank you for your word that points us always to your Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. And so we pray now that by your Spirit, you would teach us and help us to see Jesus for who he is and for all that he has done for us.

[ 2 : 45 ] Speak to us, we pray, in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, I'm sure that we have all acted as a referee for somebody at some point, and I've often been asked as a minister to give a reference for someone to act as a referee when they have applied for a job.

I don't know why people ask me to be a referee for them in applying for jobs, but anyway, I do fill out a lot of references. And so here's something I came across on the internet with some really ambiguous job reference phrases, which I think are quite useful.

Let me just read them to you. I simply cannot say enough good things about this person. A man like him is hard to find.

It seemed that her career was just taking off. This man's work is unbelievable. There is nothing that you can teach a person like this.

I assure you that no one would be better for the job. I enthusiastically recommend this person with no qualifications whatsoever.

[ 3 : 57 ] I cannot recommend this person too highly. And I love this one. You will be very fortunate if you can get this person to work for you. And my favorite, this is for a departing employee.

I am sure he will join your company as he leaves ours. Fired with enthusiasm. Not the best character references, but now I've found these ambiguous reference phrases, you maybe should be careful in asking me to be your referee ever again.

But as we continue our series in Paul's letter to the Philippians, as you were listening to the reading, you'll have noted that in the reading, Paul gives a couple of character references.

One for a man called Timothy and one for a man called Epaphroditus. Now both of these men, Timothy and Epaphroditus, worked for the apostle Paul.

And so he was able to give each of them a glowing reference. They were men who loved the Lord Jesus Christ and they were devoted to Jesus' people.

[ 5 : 00 ] And so these men, Timothy and Epaphroditus, are basically solid examples of what it means to be a Christian and of what it means to be a Christian leader.

And so if you're here today and you've never really been to church before or thought much about the Christian life, these two guys in this letter are good examples of how to live as a Christian because their lives are modeled on the life of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And really that's why these men get a mention at this particular point in Paul's letter. Because normally when you read Paul's letters, it's at the end that he mentions all the kind of names of people and commends them.

But these guys come up right in the middle. Now why is that? Well, it's simply because they are concrete examples. They are like illustrations of what Paul has been teaching us about Jesus. Where if you look down in your Bible in verse 1 to 4 of chapter 2, Paul urges the Philippians to be humble and to value others above themselves by looking to the interests of others.

[ 6 : 08 ] Then in chapter 2 verse 5 to 11, Paul gives this supreme example of the Lord Jesus Christ who humbled himself and became obedient to death on a cross.

And then following the verses that we're looking at today into chapter 3, Paul then gives himself as an example. Where he says, chapter 3 verse 17, And so Paul's saying there are some people who are worthy of imitation because they seek to follow Jesus Christ and live like him.

And so what Paul does here in chapter 2 verse 19 to 30 is he presents Timothy and he presents Epaphroditus to the Philippians as two men who exemplify and live out what he is trying to teach the Philippians and us too.

They're fantastic examples for the Philippians to follow and therefore for us to follow as well.

Because they display basically what having the mind of Christ looks like.

Chapter 2 verse 5. That's what Paul urges to his readers. Having the same mind as Christ. And then he gives us these two men who do have this mind of Christ and how they live.

[ 7 : 35 ] Chapter 1 verse 27 is a key verse in Philippians where Paul is urging the Philippians to conduct themselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. And so that's what Paul longs to see in the Philippians.

Because it's a lifestyle that we should see in every single Christian believer. Including you and me if we profess to be a Christian. So notice that Paul when he's teaching here in Philippians doesn't just give commands to be followed.

Though he does give commands to be followed. But he also gives concrete examples to be imitated. And that's a great way to teach isn't it? You don't just give your children a list of commands.

But you show them and illustrate and demonstrate what it means to obey those commands. As we look at this passage, as we look at these men, we're going to turn the spotlight first on Timothy and then Epaphroditus.

And then we're going to turn the spotlight on ourselves to see what we are like. In other words, if you were to have a character reference, what would it say?

[ 8 : 51 ] What would it say? Well, let's come back to that. Let's look at the first two points. First, the example of Timothy, verse 19 to 24. And then second, the example of Epaphroditus, verse 25 to 30.

So Timothy's example is one of selfless service. We'll see that. And Epaphroditus' example is one of sacrificial service. So first of all, Timothy and selfless service.

Now remember when Paul is writing this letter, he's in prison. So he couldn't go and visit the Philippians. But he wanted to send Timothy, who was his co-worker.

And so verse 19 says, I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, that I also may be cheered when I receive news about you. So Paul wants Timothy to go to the Philippians and report back.

And Paul wants to be encouraged as he hears about the Philippians and their progress in the faith. But he also wants to send Timothy because of his affection for the Philippians.

[ 9 : 56 ] Verse 20, Timothy loves them. I have no one else like him who will show genuine concern for your welfare. What an example Timothy is. Imagine saying that of somebody.

There's nobody else quite like him. Nobody else shows the same love and concern for your welfare as he does. Timothy. And it's great that Timothy had this genuine concern.

But it's also kind of sad, isn't it? That there's nobody else other than Timothy. There's nobody like him, Paul says. And so he explains in verse 21, And so selfishness and self-centeredness and self-absorption, they're not new things in the church.

They've always been around in the church. And they were around, clearly, in Philippi in Paul's day, amongst those Paul knew. In fact, Paul's words here in verse 21, chapter 2, echo his words earlier in chapter 2, verse 4, where he says to the Philippians that they are not to look to their own interests, but to the interests of others.

So Paul says that, and then he holds up this magnificent portrait of Jesus Christ, humbled and then exalted. And that's the model he holds up for the Philippians to follow.

[11:27] Because Jesus' death on the cross, of course, is the ultimate example of looking out for the interests of others. And so it's this same mind of Christ, with this selfless service, that Paul sees reflected in Timothy's own life.

And that's why Timothy has this genuine concern for Christians. And Philippi, where does he get that concern from? Well, Paul could trust Timothy to go to the Philippians and to serve them for the sake of Christ.

Because Timothy had already proved himself as a faithful gospel worker. So look down at verse 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.

So Paul was Timothy's spiritual father. And so Timothy's character had been formed and shaped through serving with the apostle Paul.

And Timothy would have witnessed Paul's example, the way that Paul lived his life and learned from him. And so Paul's love and concern for God's people in a sense had rubbed off onto Timothy.

[12:47] And it's like that, isn't it? If you look at families and you look at children and you know their parents and you kind of know how the children are the way they are because you've seen their parents. It just rubs off.

And so that's happened in a good way here that Timothy has this genuine love and concern for these people in Philippi. Because Paul loves people. He's a pastor. And so Paul wants to send Timothy to the Philippians because Timothy has got all the hallmarks of a faithful gospel minister. But Timothy wasn't going to go straight away. So look down again, verse 23 and 24. I hope therefore to send him as soon as I see how things go with me. And I am confident in the Lord that I myself will come soon.

So Paul's not going to send Timothy immediately because he's not quite sure how his own travel plans will work out. And so this is one of Paul's travel logs, they're often called, where he's speaking about what's going to happen next.

And he doesn't really know what's going to happen next, but he knows that he wants Timothy with him whilst he's still in prison. Because Timothy was a great support to Paul and Paul needed him.

[13:58] And so Paul would send him when he had more of an idea as to what would happen to him next. And so as we read about Timothy's example, I hope you can see the application that is here for you and me.

Well, what is the application? Well, we, like the Philippians that Paul was writing to, should learn from Timothy's example because Timothy had the same mindset as Christ Jesus.

Well, what does that mindset look like? Well, clearly it involves a genuine concern for the welfare of other people, for all God's people, all who belong to Christ's church in this world.

And also a concern for all of those who don't belong to Christ's church, that we would love to come and be part of Christ's church. And to be like this, well, it means we're not just looking out for our own interests, but we're looking out for those of Jesus's people and those we would long to see become Jesus's people.

And so you see that Timothy was selfless and Timothy wanted to do what was best for the gospel of Jesus Christ, not just what suited him.

[15:21] And I guess we've got to ask ourselves, haven't we, how concerned am I? How concerned are we for the spiritual, for the social, for the practical welfare of other people?

Are we genuinely concerned? I guess a good way to gauge is to consider and review just how much time that we have, how much of it is invested in this pursuit of being concerned for other

people compared to, say, how much of our time is invested in looking out for our own personal interests and issues.

Because you see, it's clear in Timothy's case that he proved himself as a gospel worker through his genuine concern for others. And that is really how leaders are spotted and forged and developed in the church.

they love people. They are willing to serve others. And so this selfless service is the nature and the character of any kind of ministry within the church, whatever it is.

If there's not this mindset of Christ Jesus that is willing to serve others, then it doesn't really reflect Jesus at all.

[ 16 : 41 ] And this mindset is one where we're not merely out for ourselves, but for others. So the question is, does this kind of selfless service characterize you and me?

And that reference or resume, is that what people would say about us as they look at us in church or in life or in the world or with our families? What would they say?

Okay, that's the first point. The second point is the example of Epaphroditus. And that's an example of sacrificial service in verse 25 to 30.

So Paul hoped to send Timothy soon, but Epaphroditus would come now. So who is this man, Epaphroditus? Well, he was a Christian from Philippi.

And so when the Philippians heard about Paul's imprisonment, they decided to send this man, Epaphroditus, to Paul. And Epaphroditus had a financial gift with him from the Philippians to give to Paul, which is partly why Paul is writing this letter.

[ 17 : 51 ] He wants to thank them. So look at verse 18, chapter 4. I have received full payment and have more than enough. I am amply supplied now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent.

And so Paul is sending back Epaphroditus basically with a thank you letter, which in fact is the letter we're holding in our hands, Paul's letter to the Philippians.

And so as part of this, Paul gives Epaphroditus not just this letter, but within the letter, he gives him this glowing character reference. And it's full of praise because of Epaphroditus' commitment to Jesus and his people.

In fact, Epaphroditus must have heard Paul's words because as would happen, the letter would go to the church, the church would gather, and somebody would read the letter out loud in its entirety whilst everybody sat there.

And Epaphroditus probably sat there and heard this letter being read. But he is another concrete example that Paul gives, an illustration, if you like, of what it means to serve Jesus Christ.

[ 19 : 07 ] So verse 25, but I think it is necessary to send back to you Epaphroditus, my brother, co-worker, and fellow soldier who is also your messenger whom you sent to take care of my needs.

Just see how Paul describes him here because he describes him in a number of ways. First of all, he calls Epaphroditus my brother because he was a brother in Christ. And so Epaphroditus had this personal commitment to Paul which was a result of his personal commitment to Jesus.

Paul calls him a co-worker. So Epaphroditus was a fellow worker because he also worked to see the gospel of Jesus Christ advance.

Paul knew him. Paul worked with him. That's why he could write a reference about him. And this trip, indeed, to visit Paul was gospel work.

And for Epaphroditus, it was probably a trip that involved making lots of sacrifices. So one of those would have been time. Just imagine how far Epaphroditus had to travel.

[ 20 : 16 ] Paul was likely in prison in Rome. Epaphroditus travels from Philippi, hundreds of miles to get to Paul, and then hundreds of miles back again. The travel and the time, the sacrifice for him to serve Paul and the gospel.

Paul also calls him, thirdly, a fellow soldier. Because Epaphroditus, of course, is involved in this spiritual battle that is always raging in this world.

It's what Ash mentioned in his prayer. And that's why the work of gospel ministry, the work of the church, is always hard work. Why is it hard? Well, it's because there's a war going on.

And every single believer has been recruited and deployed to fight as a soldier in this war. And so Epaphroditus is one of Paul's fellow soldiers.

And so Epaphroditus knew something of this warfare when he ministered with Paul. And yet, he's prepared to take the shots. He's prepared to endure the struggle.

[ 21 : 20 ] He is prepared to suffer by serving the gospel of Jesus Christ. And Paul calls him your messenger. Because, of course, Epaphroditus was more than the ancient version of the royal male who was just sent to pass on the gift of money to Paul.

He was a representative of the Philippians. And so finally, Paul speaks of him being a minister, a servant, who had been sent to Paul to take care of his needs.

Epaphroditus was to minister to the great apostle Paul. And so Epaphroditus is a man devoted to Jesus Christ, devoted to the gospel of Jesus Christ, and so therefore devoted to the workers who serve the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Just look at verse 26, 27. For he longs first for all of you and is distressed because you heard he was ill. 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. And so here's Epaphroditus. He wanted to be back with his church family again because he loved them.

[ 22 : 36 ] And Paul wanted to send him back because he knew Epaphroditus was distressed. And the people were distressed about Epaphroditus.

And so Epaphroditus was distressed not because he was ill, although he was ill, but because the Philippians knew he was ill. He didn't like the thought of them worrying about him.

And yet Paul wants them to know he was so sick and ill that he nearly died serving Jesus. And we don't know whether he took ill on the long journey or because he gave himself fully to serving Jesus alongside Paul.

We don't know why he was ill, but however his illness came about and however severe it was, Paul says Epaphroditus survived because of God's mercy. So that was God's mercy to Epaphroditus. He was still alive, but also God's mercy towards Paul because Paul was saved great sorrow because he would have been so sad if Epaphroditus would have died.

[ 23 : 42 ] But he didn't. He was so essential to Paul and to Paul's ministry that Paul was so glad that God had spared him. And so he wants to send Epaphroditus back to his church family and as he sends him back, he gives them this reference to take in his bag on the way so that the people in Philippi are aware of his sacrificial service for the Lord Jesus.

It's there in verse 28 to 30. 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.

So then welcome him in the Lord with great joy and honor people like him because he almost died for the work of Christ. He risked his life to make up for the help you yourselves could not give me. So Paul wants the Philippians when they receive this letter and Epaphroditus just to know and appreciate all that Epaphroditus had done.

He says he risked his life for the work of Christ. So Epaphroditus is more concerned for the progress of the gospel message of Jesus Christ than he was even about his own life.

[ 24 : 58 ] And whatever happened to him his sacrificial service nearly cost him his life. And he was willing to serve in this way. Why?

Because he had the same mindset as Christ. The Lord Jesus Christ wasn't just an example for living for Epaphroditus. Jesus was his very reason for living.

His union with Christ meant that he was not afraid to even risk his life. Everything for Jesus. How can somebody do that? Well only because they know they are secure in Christ.

And you know the reality is for all of us who profess to be Christians living for Jesus won't always be easy. It will never be risk free.

And if we want to live faithfully for Jesus in this world it is inevitably going to involve sacrifice. That can't be avoided. And it may be noted by other people the sacrifices we make just as Epaphroditus' was by Paul but sometimes the sacrifices we make serve the Lord Jesus go completely unnoticed by everybody else.

[ 26 : 17 ] And even if everything is unseen in this world the Lord the Lord sees and the Lord knows and the Lord is our judge he understands and he uses his people's service in this world to produce fruit that lasts for all eternity.

So don't ever be discouraged if you're serving Jesus and it seems to do very little or nothing or even if nobody ever sees what you do.

Because what Paul is doing here is he's holding up Timothy he's holding up Epaphroditus as solid examples of how to live for Jesus. Because living for Jesus is never a waste of time.

It is never a waste of life. Investing yourself your time your treasures in the work of the gospel is never wasted. Because we see here how through their service for Jesus these men show us how we should serve Jesus.

And as we just look at their example it is a challenge isn't it? Because it forces us to reflect on what my service for Jesus Christ is like.

[ 27 : 35 ] How willing am I not just to risk my life that's a big thing but to risk anything to sacrifice anything for Jesus. just think of Epaphroditus.

Basically he had to hand deliver this package of money to Paul taking a letter from Philippi to Paul and then back again. And even in doing that simple task though it was hard he was engaged in gospel work.

And so the question is well how am I serving the work of the gospel of Jesus Christ in the place where God has set me and with the people that God has put all around me?

And how am I using the gifts that God has given me to serve? Do I sacrificially serve with the mind of Christ?

Because if I'm a Christian and I profess to believe in Jesus and want to live for Jesus then I must become more like Jesus. And so together as a church we must better reflect Jesus in our life together.

[ 28 : 47 ] If we call ourselves Christ Church Glasgow then we need to be more like Christ don't we? Or we fall foul of the Trade Descriptions Act. You see one of the dangers for the church today is it can just be so easy to have a consumeristic approach.

That's how we treat everything else in life as a consumer. We pay our money to the gym and we want to get stuff. We go to the theatre we want to get something.

We pay money we expect to get. And so often in the church that infiltrates how we approach church life where it's more about what we get out of it for ourselves than it is about what we can do to serve.

And of course we should enjoy receiving. You come to church to receive. You need to be with God's people hearing God's word every Sunday in worship.

That's giving and it's something we all need to receive. We need corporate worship. But sometimes we can do very little by way of serving with our time, with our talents, with our treasures.

[ 30 : 02 ] We were too busy to simply volunteer for a ministry or anything let alone lead a ministry. We've got these God given abilities that God has blessed us with because if we're a Christian we all have gifts.

And we can be so busy using them out there in the world where you don't have any time left to use them in the church. And we've got so many material blessings and they all come from God but so often we just want to make sure that we are comfortable first before we're giving what we can spare to gospel work.

And so can you see how having the mind of Christ means that we commit ourselves, we invest our time, we use our gifts, we give our money and actually we find joy in sacrificial service.

Jesus for the joy set before him endured the cross. He was glad to go and suffer and die for you and me. And so can you see how Timothy and Epaphroditus were all in?

They were two guys who were all in. I wonder if we can say that when it comes to our Christian life and living. Am I all in? Or do I actually hold back?

[ 31 : 28 ] Because I know going all in will be too risky, it will be too costly, it will be too time consuming. We know living for Jesus does involve selfless sacrificial service and it can be just too much.

Because you see if we follow Jesus, we don't just follow Jesus, we are to follow the example of Jesus, follow his humility with lives that imitate his selfless and sacrificial service.

Because you discover that lives that do truly emulate and imitate Jesus are beautiful lives. As I was preparing this message this week, I was reminded of one of my friends from Aberdeen.

He was the president of the Aberdeen University Christian Union and I can remember late one Friday night we had the Christian Union meeting in one of the lecture theatres at the university and I'd left something in the lecture theatre and I went back about an hour after, everybody else had gone out with their friends and here was the president of the Christian Union on his own in the lecture theatre walking between all the seats picking up all the rubbish and I don't even think it was the CU's rubbish, it was just probably the rubbish that had built up over the week in that lecture

theatre.

And so he wasn't looking out for his own interests, I'm sure it would have been in his best interests not to be there picking up rubbish at 10.30 on a Friday night. But what he was doing was sacrificially serving and giving his time.

[ 33 : 14 ] Well why? Well he was concerned about the witness of the Christian Union in the university but ultimately he was chiefly concerned about the reputation of Jesus and the work of the gospel.

And he set a great example and not because he picked up the rubbish but because he had the same mindset as Christ Jesus. And Andy, my friend, he's now a top lawyer in Edinburgh working for a top law firm and he's a committed elder at his church and he still serves.

Despite working in one of the busiest jobs in the city, he still finds time to give and serve to his church. Because he still has that same mindset that serves Christ and his people.

And I'm sure we can think of many other people who like Timothy, like Epaphroditus, selflessly and sacrificially serve. Even quietly and unspectacularly, they just get on with serving Jesus and his people.

And so that's why Paul raises up before the Philippians and before us, Timothy and Epaphroditus. They're great examples and he says, watch men like these.

[ 34 : 37 ] Look at them. And if you don't know, let me tell you what they do. Let me tell you how they have served the work of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

They're great examples. To motivate the Philippians, but also to motivate us. Not because we should be like them, but because they help illustrate what it means to follow Jesus.

We catch a glimpse of Christ-likeness in them. Which is what we should increasingly become ourselves, isn't it? More like Jesus.

Paul says in Romans chapter 8, for those God foreknew, he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his son. So whether it's Timothy or whether it's Epaphroditus or whether it's you or whether it's me, God's purpose is to conform us into the image of Jesus.

Jesus. And so it all comes back to having the same mindset as Christ. Because Timothy's example of selfless service and Epaphroditus' example of sacrificial service and Paul's example of suffering service are all given as illustrations.

[ 36 : 02 ] after Paul has proclaimed the supreme self-sacrificing suffering service of Jesus Christ. And so as those who have been saved by Christ and who are united to Christ, well we must become more like Christ.

Which means turning away from self-importance, self-interest, self-promotion, self-focus, even self-protection and living a life of selfless, sacrificial service for the one who willingly gave his life in selfless, sacrificial, suffering service for us.

And there's no way we'll ever pursue this kind of lifestyle unless we keep coming back to the willingness of Jesus to sacrifice himself for all our rubbish.

It wasn't his rubbish, the rubbish of sin that he died for. It was our rubbish, the way we've treated God and everybody else. Jesus died so that we can be forgiven.

And so it's to the degree that we've grasped how much Jesus has served us that we will then want to live a life of service for him, for his people, for his world.

[ 37 : 29 ] Let's pray.