

Message #15**Philippians 2:25-30**

We live in a time in history when there are big name Christian superstars. The big boys are typically on Television. They have their own programs. They have their own jets. They sponsor their own cruises. They take in millions and millions of dollars and they are in the big time.

Set against the big name superstar Christians are Christians who aren't ever in the limelight. They don't get any fanfare and they don't have any glamour. They take a meal to someone. They go pick up someone to come to church. They take someone to a doctor's appointment or run to the store and pick up some groceries. They take someone to lunch and sit and listen to their problems. From the superstar world they are nobodies. But they are not nobodies to God. They are eternal superstars.

You will not probably come across too many people in your lifetime named Epaphroditus, but the one you meet in the Bible is sure worth knowing. This is the only letter in the N.T. that mentions him (2:25; 4:18). His name was relatively common in the Roman world in the first century.

The name Epaphroditus means "favored of Aphrodite." It was a heathen name. The shortened form of the name is Epaphras (i.e. Daniel, Dan). There is an Epaphras that is mentioned in Colossians 1:7; 4:12; Philemon 23. The Epaphras in Colossians and Philemon is apparently a different man. Apparently he came out of a heathen background and had come to faith in Christ.

This Epaphroditus was a faithful man in the Philippian church. The church decided to send a man to Paul in order to give him finances and also to help him and the man they chose to send from the church was Epaphroditus.

He was not some major communicator of God's Word. He was a behind scenes kind of man. He was loyal to God. He was loyal to the Philippian church and he was loyal to Paul. While Epaphroditus was with Paul, he became very sick (v. 26) to the point that he almost died.

There are about eleven reasons in the Bible why people get sick:

- 1) We live in an imperfect environment. I Tim. 5:23
- 2) We learn to rely more on God's grace. II Cor. 12:7-10
- 3) We are under an attack of Satan trying to get us to turn away from God. Job 2:3-10
- 4) We are used by God so that He may glorify Himself by our healing. John 11:1-4
- 5) We have reached our appointed moment to die and sickness is the means. II Kings 13:14-20
- 6) We are being directed by God to do His will. Gal. 4:13-14
- 7) We don't heed medical counsel and take medicine. I Tim. 5:23
- 8) We don't pray that we will get better and recover. II Chron. 16:12-13
- 9) We are being judged for unconfessed, unfaced sin. I Cor. 11:30; James 5:13-18; Rev. 2:22-23
- 10) We are being developed into Christ-like believer who can minister to others. II Cor. 1:5-6
- 11) We live in an imperfect, finite body that breaks down. Phil. 2:25-30

That is the case here. Epaphroditus worked himself to the point of physical exhaustion and he almost died.

Apparently the Philippians got word of this (2:26). Paul and Epaphroditus thought it would be best if he went back to Philippi to encourage the people.

Now when you are a group of people who have gone to the time and expense to send a guy like Epaphroditus to be with Paul, and then he gets sick and then comes home, you can begin to look at that person in a negative way.

The Philippians certainly wanted to see the Apostle Paul and they would certainly want to see the gifted Timothy, but apparently Paul was concerned that they might not be too excited to see one of their own, Epaphroditus, who had to come early. So Paul writes the Philippians these words to prevent that from happening.

What he says is this:

THERE ARE THOSE IN THE LOCAL CHURCH WHO ARE TO BE HIGHLY ESTEEMED BECAUSE OF THEIR FAITHFUL SERVICE FOR GOD AND LOYAL COMMITMENT TO THOSE CALLED TO TEACH GOD'S WORD.

Epaphroditus was a very faithful man of God in the local church. He was not a big name Christian leader. He was not a great orator or teacher. He was a very faithful man of God and Paul wanted the Philippians to know that. Actually they already knew that, he is just reminding them of that.

In fact, the verb “receive him” (2:29) means to favorably admit, accept and expectantly look for and receive him in a joyful manner. This is a rare word for Paul. He uses it in reference to Phoebe (Rom. 16:2), in reference to Jesus Christ (Titus 2:13), and here in reference to Epaphroditus. The word “high regard” (2:29) means to view this one with high honor and esteem. He was to be viewed as a precious prize.

Paul wanted the Philippians to look forward to meeting Epaphroditus with joyful expectancy and to view him as a highly honored and esteemed man of God.

Now Paul brings out two realities about the life and ministry of Epaphroditus:

REALITY #1 – Epaphroditus had a wonderful connection to Paul. 2:25

Paul was a gifted Apostle. He never thought he deserved that gift of calling, but God, in His sovereign grace, made Paul that. He was a faithful minister for God. Epaphroditus recognized that. He knew that Paul was in a league of his own and, as a result, he connected himself to Paul. There are four ways he personally connected himself to Paul:

Connection #1 - Epaphroditus was Paul's brother. **2:25a**

Now technically the word “brother” refers to one born of the same parent. Epaphroditus, like Paul, had been born of God. They were brothers in the family of God. They both were in the same family, the family of God.

Now I do think that Paul is using this term in more than just he is a brother or Christian. He uses an article before the noun “brother” so Paul is stressing that this is my specific brother. This was a family member who was closely connected to Paul.

Jesus had twelve disciples, but to three of those disciples, He was very close. That is that way it was with Paul and Epaphroditus.

Some of the closest friendships you will ever develop will be family of God friendships. There probably won't be many, but there might be one or two who will truly be your dear trusted brother and friend. Epaphroditus was that for Paul.

Connection #2 - Epaphroditus was Paul's fellow worker. **2:25b**

That word “fellow-worker” means just what it says. Epaphroditus worked alongside the Apostle Paul. He involved himself in Paul's life and in Paul's work. Make no mistake about this, it was Paul's ministry. Epaphroditus linked himself to the ministry and work of Paul and he is forever honored because of it.

Connection #3 - Epaphroditus was Paul's fellow soldier. **2:25c**

Most people don't get this point, but this world is not a play-ground, it is a battle-ground. We are in war here. Epaphroditus was no spiritual wimp; he was a warrior. He was the kind of man who would be right at your side in a fight. Paul could count on him. He stood beside Paul, with Paul and for Paul. He was not one who ran in the heat of the battle. He was a good soldier; a fellow soldier. He defended Paul's ministry and he defended Paul's teaching, which was pure grace. Paul viewed him as a fellow soldier. Epaphroditus was rock solid. He was in the action and he was a good soldier.

Connection #4 - Epaphroditus was Paul's needs minister. **2:25d**

Paul said this man ministered to my needs. The word “minister” (λειτουργία) is one that means to minister and serve at one's own expense (G. Abbott-Smith, *Greek Lexicon*, p. 266). Apparently, Epaphroditus took care of things that Paul needed, sometimes at his own expense.

Now the word “need” does speak of things really needed. These are things that are necessities. Epaphroditus kept track of Paul's needs and did everything he could to meet those needs and often it was at his own expense.

Now by virtue of the fact that Paul was locked in jail, we know Epaphroditus was no grandstander. He is not doing these things so everyone will know it and see it. He had no idea that Paul was even going to mention this. But Paul did mention this because God wanted it in His Word.

There will be those highly honored in eternity who spotted a need in someone truly gifted by God and they just took it upon themselves to meet the need.

Paul wanted Epaphroditus highly esteemed because of his great ministry to Paul.

REALITY #2 – Epaphroditus had a wonderful connection to the church. **2:26-30**

Epaphroditus had an amazing and intimate connection to the church of Philippi. There are three specific connections:

Connection #1 - He was the messenger of the church. **2:25**

Epaphroditus was the Philippian messenger. Actually, the word “messenger” is the same word used as “apostle,” which means he had been specifically commissioned by the Philippian church and was specifically sent to Paul.

Paul is saying you need to honor this man because he is the one you chose and sent from your church to come and minister to me.

Connection #2 - He had a longing for the church. **2:26-28**

Epaphroditus longed for the people of the church. That word means he had his greatest desire and distress was to be with the Philippians because they heard he was sick.

Paul says in **verse 27** he was very sick and he nearly died. This certainly can prompt each of us to ask for what would we would be willing to work ourselves to death? Would you be willing to work yourself to death for a house? Retirement? Gold? Promotion? How about God? Epaphroditus worked himself almost to death for God.

By the way, Paul could not heal him. The year was A.D. 62 and his healing powers were no longer operative as an Apostle.

Now what is amazing about this is that when Epaphroditus was deathly sick, his greatest desire and distress was not that of being healed of his illness; it was that of being a heavy burden to the Philippians.

Paul obviously prayed for him that God would heal him and according to **verse 27**, God mercifully answered that prayer. So Paul says I want to eagerly send him back to you so you can rejoice in what God has done in giving him back his health.

Connection #3 - He nearly died ministering for the church. **2:29-30**

These verses make it clear that God considered Epaphroditus' care for Paul as a ministry for Jesus Christ.

Epaphroditus nearly died for the work of God. He sensed there had been a real deficiency and shortcoming from the Philippians to truly meet Paul's needs and he did everything he could at his own expense to meet the need and complete the deficiency.

There is no greater reason to nearly die than risking your life for God.

The thing that is amazing is that he risked his life to minister to Paul and by doing that, he nearly died. He got very, very sick.

Paul says this is the kind of man you need to honor.

The message that they were risking their lives to communicate is a message that says you are not saved by your works or religion, but you are saved by faith alone in Christ alone.