

Proven Worth

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[0 : 0 0] Good morning. My name is Matthew Capone, and I'm the assistant pastor here at Cheyenne Mountain Presbyterian Church. And it's my joy to bring God's word to you today. A special welcome if you are new or visiting with us.

We're glad you're here. And we're glad you're here not because you are filling a seat, but because we are following Jesus together as one community. And we're convinced that because of Jesus, there is no one so good that they don't need God's grace, and no one so bad that they can't have it.

And so God has something to say to all of us, and all of us need to hear what God has to say to us in his word. Now, if you have been with us for a while, you know that we're going through the book of Philippians.

And as I've said before, Philippians is a letter. And it's a letter written to a church. It's a church very similar to our church in a city very similar to our city. And I've said that, but I haven't talked a lot about the mechanics of the fact that it's a letter.

So we've said that it's a letter over and over. I've talked about what's going on in Philippi, but we haven't talked about the letter part of the letter until now. And so how do you think a letter would make it from one place in the ancient world to another?

[1 : 1 0] Did Paul take out an envelope and stick this letter into it and then stick a Roman stamp on it and send it to Philippi? He did not. As advanced as the Roman Empire was, they did not have that kind of postal service and system.

So they had great roads, but people had to carry letters from one place to another. And so we're going to learn about some letter logistics today. We're going to hear about a man named Timothy and a man named Epaphroditus.

And the reason we're going to hear about them is because Paul needs to tell the Philippian church some very practical things. Epaphroditus was from the Philippian church, and he traveled from Philippi to Rome. And he did that for two reasons.

One, to give Paul a financial gift, which we'll talk about in a few weeks when we get to chapter 4. Paul needed money. He was in prison. The Philippian church supported him. That was part of their partnership with him in the gospel. But Epaphroditus was also sent to help Paul.

Paul is in house arrest in Rome. And so they think, here's this great founder of our church. Not only does he need financial resources, he also needs someone who can come alongside him and assist him.

[2 : 1 3] And so Paul has two main points that he wants to communicate to the Philippians here. One, my friend Timothy is going to stay with me. And point two, Epaphroditus, who you sent to help me, I'm going to send him back to you instead of letting him help me.

So that's the point of this passage. So we can end the sermon, we can go home. Right? No. The question is, what do we learn from logistics like this?

What do we learn from these simple details, these practical details about Paul, and the fact that he has a friend coming to him, the fact that someone needs to carry a letter, the fact that there's all these logistics involved.

So many of you know that I go hiking a lot. It's one of my favorite things to do here in Colorado Springs. That'll be one of my first answers if you ask me what I do when I'm not preaching and working here at Cheyenne Mountain.

And one of my favorite places to go is Cheyenne Mountain State Park, which is just 10 minutes south of here. Yeah? And if you go on, if you're like me and you've done a lot of exploring, you're familiar with the, I don't do directions super well.

[3 : 21] If you're like me, if you've explored, you're familiar with all the different trails. And if you go on the Sundance Trail, you know there's lots of different signs that you'll see as you go along, nature signs telling you about different animals.

And my favorite sign is on the Sundance Trail, and it talks about what animals do in the winter. So there's different strategies animals have. The bears hibernate. Apparently the beetles hibernate too. I didn't know that.

But if you go to the park, you'll see a lot of deer. And there are mule deer apparently. And the mule deer, they don't hibernate. They migrate. And so there's a little sidebar that talks about the mule deer and what they do, and it says this.

Young deer learn the route to their winter range by following their elders. Then generally use the same route every year. And so the point is this.

Remember last week we asked, how do we grow as Christians? And we saw that it's God that works and wills in us. And one of the ways that we grow as Christians is by following other people who know the route.

[4 : 22] One of the ways we grow as Christians is by following other people who know the route. And so explicitly, Paul is telling us about Epaphroditus and Timothy because of the logistics of his letter.

But implicitly, they serve here as his sermon illustrations. So Paul's been preaching this sermon through a letter to the church in Philippi. He hasn't used really any illustrations yet, except we heard about the lights and the stars.

That was sort of an illustration. But he doesn't need to tell us about these people at this point in the letter, right? He could have told us at the beginning. He could have told us at the end. But he presents Timothy and Epaphroditus to us right after he's told us about the need for humility, the need to grow as Christians.

And so we first saw Christ as our example at the beginning of chapter 2. And now Timothy and Epaphroditus are going to serve as examples as well. And so our question is this.

As we are following people who know the route, what type of people should we follow? Who should we look to as leaders in our congregation? Who should we look to as people that we want to learn from and emulate?

[5 : 26] We're going to see from Timothy and Epaphroditus here exactly the sort of people that we're going to go after. Who do we want to learn the route from so that we can follow it year by year?

We're in the book of Philippians. We're in chapter 2 and we're going to start on verse 19. It's going to be in your worship guide as well, pretty close to the back. And remember that this is God's word.

And God tells us that his word is more precious than gold, even the finest gold. And it is sweeter than honey, even honey that comes straight from the honeycomb.

And so we're going to read it now. Please read with me starting at verse 19. I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon so that I too may be cheered by news of you. For I have no one like him who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare.

For they all seek their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. But you know Timothy's proven worth. How as a son with a father, he has served with me in the gospel.

[6 : 29] Verse 23. I hope therefore to send him just as soon as I see how it will go with me. And I trust in the Lord that shortly I myself will come also. Verse 25. 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.

For he has been longing for you all and has been distressed because you heard that he was ill. 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.

Verse 28. I am the more eager to send him therefore that you may rejoice at seeing him again and that I may be less anxious. So receive him in the Lord with all joy and honor such men.

For he nearly died for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete what was lacking in your service to me. Please pray with me as we come to this portion of God's word.

Amen. Dear Father in heaven, we thank you for a sunny day, for the sun that reminds us that you are the one who provides us with everything we need.

[7 : 41] You're the one who sustains us. We thank you for your word, which we need to know you and your ways. And we thank you that you've given it to us. We ask that you would help us to understand, that you would send your Holy Spirit to do what we would otherwise be unable to do, and that's to hear from you.

We ask all these things in the name of your Son. Amen. So who should we follow? What type of people do we want to be looking to and looking after?

Paul cuts to the chase pretty quickly. He says he's going to send Timothy to them soon, but not right away in verse 21. And then we find out why right away in verse 20, excuse me, verse 19, and then verses 20 and 21.

He says, I have no one like him who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare, for they all seek their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ, but you know Timothy's proven worth. Does this sound familiar at all?

Remember we talked at the beginning of chapter 2 about Paul's command to seek the interests of others above your own interests. And here he says, Timothy does just that.

[8 : 47] He's genuinely concerned for your welfare. He doesn't seek his own interests. He seeks those of Jesus Christ. He is, as we've talked about before, Timothy is a question person, not an answer person. Timothy's the kind of person who's shown that he cares about others more than himself.

He's willing to put the needs of the community first. And he's done this for such a long time that he has proven worth in verse 22. Now what do we make of the fact that he says, I have no one like him?

Is Timothy the only person that Paul knows who models this character? Is the only person in the church who's able to seek other people's interests above his own? Well, we find out in the very next section that we also have Epaphroditus.

So Paul is clearly not saying literally there's no one like Timothy. He's using hyperbole here, but he's making the point that this is something that's rare. It's rare to find someone who's interested in others rather than themselves.

I had a professor who loved to teach about conflict, and he talked a lot about the conflict that would happen between people who have very different personalities. And he would go through all different types of personality tests and explain how this person with this kind of way of viewing the world would come into conflict with another person.

[9 : 56] But then he would always provide this one caveat. He would say, but character trumps personality every time. And then he would pause again.

And he would say, but unfortunately, character is in short supply. And so what Paul is saying is this when he talks about Timothy. Character is in short supply.

It is rare. It is difficult. It's hard to find someone like Timothy who's really willing to put the interests of others above his own interests. And so that's why he's the example here. That's why Paul is talking about his character and his life, the fact that he's proven over time that he is willing to sacrifice and to serve.

When I was in seminary, so I have two professor stories for you today. I already gave you the first one. I had a professor who told several times about his time in seminary.

He had a fellow classmate of his and this classmate was incredibly dedicated. And so when it came time for graduation, you know, they give out the award.

[11 : 07] Someone gets the theology award. Someone else gets the church history award. Someone else gets the Bible award. And this student ran all of them.

He ran the whole track. He won every single award. So there was not a single award left for anyone else. So of course people envied him. They were impressed by him. They admired him.

After graduation, the next week, this student's wife filed for divorce. And I'm not excusing his wife.

I'm not saying that was the right thing for her to do. But the point of the story was this. Knowledge is necessary, but not sufficient. This student knew a lot of facts about Jesus.

He had a lot of things in his head. He dedicated himself to memorizing and understanding. But he had revealed in the way he'd behaved as a husband and a father that he did not understand anything about Jesus.

[12 : 14] He had the knowledge. Factually. But he had no real knowledge. And it's not that knowledge isn't important.

It's necessary, but it's not sufficient. Christian maturity does not come from winning awards in Bible knowledge. It comes from selflessness. When he says here, I have no one like Timothy, we could translate that as like-minded.

It's similar language to what we saw at the beginning of chapter 2. I have no one who has the same mind as Timothy does. And remember we talked about before that this same mind is not that they agree about everything theologically.

We would assume that Paul has trained Timothy, that Timothy agrees with Paul. But it's that they have the same mind relationally. They have the same mind towards other people and towards self-sacrifice.

It's possible to know the gospel factually, but not know the gospel. And we've already seen that in chapter 1. Remember Paul told us that there were people who were preaching the gospel accurately, but they were doing it out of envy and ambition and selfishness.

[13 : 23] Remember he said in verses 12 through 14, he said they're preaching the gospel out of ambition and conceit, but I praise God because the gospel is being preached. And so we already have this category that it's possible to know the facts about God, but not to know God.

It's preaching the gospel accurately versus living the gospel accurately. And Timothy here has demonstrated through his selflessness over time that he knows the gospel.

He knows about Jesus' sacrifice because he sacrifices. That's the proof that he understands the reality of Jesus and his death and his resurrection.

There was recently an interview with a man who's become famous just recently. His name's Jordan Peterson. I am not advocating his teaching by quoting him, by the way. He has many things to say.

He's right about many things. He's very wrong about many things. And, spoiler, most of what he says about the Bible is very, very wrong. Okay? So I'm not endorsing him in any way, but he had this fascinating quote recently.

[14 : 29] A few months ago, he was on Firing Line on PBS, and the interviewer, Margaret Hoover, asked him this. She said, I want to ask you about your personal faith. Christians who watch you have listened closely over the last two years about whether you self-identify as a Christian or not.

And just to provide some background, Jordan Peterson has a lot of things to say about the Bible. Most of them are wrong, but since he has so much to say, people are wondering about whether he's a Christian. And here was his answer. People think that what they believe is what they say they believe.

I don't believe that. I believe that what people believe is what they act out. And so I said, I act as if God exists. That's a sufficient statement as far as I'm concerned.

You know, what's the old saying? By their fruits, you shall know them. Same idea, right? It's a matter of action and a matter of commitment. And so as wrong as he is on many things, Jordan Peterson has caught on to something that what we believe is not so much what we say we believe is what we act we believe.

And this, again, is not to pit knowledge against belief. Jordan Peterson is not right in saying that it's okay not to tell people where he stands, right? But he has hit something that's true, which is that it's our actions that reveal our beliefs more than anything else.

[15 : 51] And so that is what Paul is telling us about Timothy. Timothy's actions have revealed his beliefs. And that's why we're told he has proven worth. And so if you remember last week, we asked, how is it that we're able to obey?

What does God do? And we saw that he gives us a new will, a new ability to obey. But one of the ways he does that, some of that is through his spirit's work directly in our hearts, but a lot of it is from the people around us.

Paul's presenting Timothy and Epaphroditus here as people that the Philippian church can follow after. And so part of God's work in our lives, part of his working and willing that we saw in verses 12 and 13 is the people who are around us right now.

God has provided people who know the route that we can follow. We can learn from those with proven worth. And so if you want to learn how to be an encourager, then you should probably spend some time with Paula Johnson.

If you want to learn how to have empathy and compassion for other people, you're probably going to need to spend more time with Mark Fairbrother and Harvey Carlson.

[17 : 11] If you want to learn what it's like to persevere and have faith, then you should probably go to Mary Vincent's Bible study. Part of God's grace for us, his ways that he enables us and empowers us is the people around us.

He gives us his spirit, but he also gives us his church. He gives us Timothys and Epaphrodituses that we can learn the route. We can learn the way to walk as Christians. And this is also why we need the church.

So sometimes you'll hear people say something like this, you know, I have a Bible study that I really enjoy and I really like, and you know, that's really my church. That's where I get my fellowship. Those people are the, I don't need to be somewhere on a Sunday morning.

I'm in a college group, you know, with these other college students and we worship together on Tuesday nights, and that's where my spiritual needs get met. But you know, it's surprising how much those groups look exactly like you.

People who are similar to you probably believe the same things as you. Where are you going to find Timothy and Epaphroditus? Where are you going to find people who are different from you?

- [18 : 25] People who are different in terms of their age and their life stage. People who are different in terms of their knowledge and experience. It's going to be here in the church. One of the things I love about our church here at Cheyenne Mountain is the diversity we have of ages and generations and experiences.

When you come to a church, you don't get to self-select the people who are going to be the Christians who walk alongside you. But you get to come where there's a group of people, many of whom have walked the route for a long, long time.

They have what Paul says here, they have proven worth. Verse 22. You know Timothy's proven worth. He has shown again and again that he's the type of person you should follow.

He's the type of person you can learn from and model. And so who should we follow? What should we be looking for? Who should we model ourselves after? Who are the leaders of our church?

We should be looking for Timothys. We should be looking for people who give up, who are willing to put others above themselves that are willing to lose.

- [19 : 34] If you know the qualifications for church officers that Paul gives in 1 Timothy 3, there is basically one qualification that has to do with any gift. And that's the ability to teach and it's the knowledge of right doctrine.

Every single qualification he gives besides that is a qualification of character. That it is character, not gifts, that ultimately determine God's leaders.

And so if we're wondering who we should follow, it's the people of proven worth. Those whose character has revealed what they believe. They have proved themselves through their selflessness rather than their rightness.

They proved themselves through their selflessness rather than their rightness. Timothy is not the only person here.

We have Epaphroditus in verse 25. And Epaphroditus gets a lot of titles. Did you notice that? Did you notice all the names Paul gives him? 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.

- [20 : 48] In other words, Epaphroditus is a team player kind of guy. Epaphroditus is a fellow worker, a fellow soldier. He's someone who works alongside other people.

Epaphroditus is not a lone ranger going out on God's mission by himself. He's someone who's worked side by side with people in Philippi and he's worked side by side with Paul.

And so Paul commends him for that. And then we see Epaphroditus' love and concern for the rest of the church. He's been longing for the church in Philippi, verse 26.

Background information, Epaphroditus got very, very sick as we see her on his way to deliver the letter to Paul. So part of the reason he's sending Epaphroditus back is everyone in Philippi heard that Epaphroditus almost died and so they've been praying for him.

They're concerned about him. They want to see him. And so Paul's modeling selflessness as well. This man Epaphroditus who was sent to help him, he out of his concern for the church in Philippi sends him back so that they can be reunited with Epaphroditus and know that he's well.

[21 : 52] And we find out that when he comes back, verse 28, they're going to rejoice at seeing him. And so they should receive him in the Lord with all joy and honor him because he risked his life to complete what was lacking in your service to me.

And so Epaphroditus here is also modeling the sacrifice that we saw in Philippians 2, verses 5 through 11 about Christ. There's an echo of language here that Christ gave up his life for the sake of others.

And here Epaphroditus almost lost his life. That Epaphroditus too is a fellowship kind of guy. I've told you before that the book of Philippians is about partnership in the gospel. Epaphroditus is a partnership kind of guy.

So Timothy is a sacrifice kind of guy. He's a selflessness kind of guy. Epaphroditus is a partnership kind of guy. He sacrifices as well, but he is eager to work with and alongside other people.

And so who do we follow? What are we looking for? We're looking for Timothys who are selfless, but we're also looking for Epaphroditus' who are workers, who are partners, people who work alongside and with other people.

[23 : 02] Those are the individuals that God has given us in our church to learn from and grow. And so on the one hand, we see Epaphroditus and Timothy as our models here, right?

They're selfless and partner kind of people. But it might feel like here that this is similar to what we talked about last week. Remember we talked about the lifting the car feeling, the feeling that Christian obedience is lifting a car with no jack.

It's this great impossible task that God's calling us to things we're unable to do. And we've talked about the fact that the traditionally religious person says be good like I'm good.

It could feel a little bit like Paul is saying, okay, Timothy and Epaphroditus, be good like they're good. And it's the non-religious person that says there is no good, right, or find your own good.

But it's the gospel, it's the gospel person that's able to say, no one is good, only Jesus is good. And so what Paul is saying here is not that we pull ourselves up by the bootstraps to be like Timothy and Epaphroditus.

[24 : 15] But Timothy and Epaphroditus are examples of God at work in people's lives. First of all, willing and working. So if we want to know, you know, there's lots of answers we could give to the question of how do we know God's real?

There are philosophical answers we could give about why does God exist? And many of those are good and helpful. But we also have a relational community answer that we can know God is real and he's at work when we see the lives around us of people who have walked with God for a long time.

And they can tell us, hey, I used to be like this, but now I've changed. And the reason I've changed is because God is at work. And so what we see in Timothy and Epaphroditus are not these models that we simply pull ourselves up to meet.

But we see examples, encouragements that God really is at work. He really does change people's lives. He's done it for Timothy and Epaphroditus. And secondly, he doesn't ask us to walk the walk of obedience alone by ourselves.

He never asks us to pull ourselves up by our bootstraps. But he gives us Timothys and Epaphrodituses to walk with us. And so God's grace comes to us not just as he gives us his spirit to change our desires and our abilities, but his grace comes to us as he gives us each other as examples, as models, as encouragers to help along the way.

[25 : 47] I can't imagine that we would do anything but gain from Timothy if you were here right now. Here's a man who's willing to give himself up anything he can do for other people.

Timothy wouldn't be someone to come alongside and say, be good like I'm good. Timothy would be someone who would be giving himself to others saying, no one is good but Jesus is good and I'm going to come with you and walk with you. And so that's what we do as a church here.

That is how God works in our lives. And so that is why we're not saying be good like Timothy and Epaphroditus are good. But Timothy and Epaphroditus show us that Jesus is good.

They show us the reality that he has in people's lives that they have seen what we saw in verses 6 and 11 that Jesus gave up his life and that has changed them as well.

In 2009 the naturalist Tristan Gouley went on a journey in the Libyan Sahara and he had two nomads with him who were guides and he's kind of a tracker and so he asked them, he had two fears.

[26 : 55] One, he was going to lose them in the desert in the Sahara and his other fear was that he would run into danger. And so at one point he talked to the older of the guide, the guide's name was Amgar and he asked him how am I not going to lose you?

How am I going to know if there's danger? So the guide lifted up his foot and showed him the tracks on the bottom of his shoe and then he pointed to the tracks in the sand and he said now you will never lose me.

And then later along as they were going he pointed to some wavy lines in the sand which were the tracks the pattern left by a snake that had been going through the desert.

And he said do you see those? Now you will have no bad surprises. And so Amgar he never lost Tristan never lost Amgar in the desert he just kept following in his footsteps knowing the distinctive mark of his shoes in the sand.

Brothers and sisters as we're looking and seeking to live the Christian life together we look to the distinctive mark of those around us who are selfless and partners.

[28 : 20] God gives us to them gives us to each other to help us along the way and show us the route so that we will never get lost. And so that as we stick close to those tracks and they stick close to God we can make it through together.

and so those are the tracks that we follow. Those are the people we model ourselves after. Those are the people we look to as our leaders. That's the grace that God has given us as we walk together as one community following Jesus together.

Please pray with me. Dear Father in Heaven we thank you for the grace that you give to us.

First of all the grace in your son who came and died for us who gave up his life but secondly in the grace of each other that you've given to us you've given us the gift of the church.

You've given us saints who have proven their worth who have walked for a long time and shown that they truly know you. And so we ask that you would give us the desire and the ability to follow them more and more.

[29 : 37] We ask that you'd build us and grow us together here as one community. We ask all these things in the name of your son. Amen. Please stand for our closing hymn.