

# A PATTERN FOR CHRISTIAN LIFE

---

## A SERMON

DELIVERED ON THE SABBATH AFTERNOON OF MARCH 5TH, 2023 BY

MATT LEONARD

AT MOUNT PLEASANT BAPTIST CHURCH, VANCOUVER

---

If you remember from Acts 16, Paul planted the church at Philippi on his second missionary journey. This would have been about 15 years after his conversion. After planting the church Paul returned a few years later while on his third missionary journey. However, before he could visit a fourth time he was arrested, sent to Rome, and put under house arrest. It was from here that he wrote a number of letters including those to the churches in Ephesus, Colossi and Philippi, along with a letter to Philemon who was a leader in the Colossian church.

So far Paul has covered a pretty wide range of subjects from, thanksgiving to love, the advancement of the gospel, and living like Christ. He has talked about humility, servanthood, disunity, and grumbling. However now it feels as if Paul is pausing, taking a break from his deep theological subjects, and giving us a rundown of the travel plans of two of his friends.

On first reading verses 19 - 30 we get the feeling that nothing overly exciting is happening. And we can be tempted to wish Paul would get back to the real meat of the letter. It almost feels like a character development scene in the middle of the Marvel movie. Yes it's interesting to get some back story on Ironman, but we really want to get back into the action. "Stop talking and let's blow some stuff up!" However we know that all of scripture is God breathed, and unlike a movie, Paul isn't stalling for time, or take a breath so the action can build again.

**T**hese verses are in our Bibles for a reason, for edification, to bless us, to lift our eyes to heaven, and help us see the gospel more clearly. Nothing in scripture is there simply as a filler, as padding before we get back into the action. The book of Proverbs reminds us, "Every word of God is tested; He is a shield to those who take refuge in Him." (Proverbs 30:5)

**I**n our Bible, this section may be titled, 'Timothy and Epaphroditus', For these are the main two characters Paul is focusing our attention on. He will talk about their desire to return to the Philippians, their concern and their love for the church, and most importantly, their love for the gospel. But before we go any further let us remind ourselves of God's word.

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. 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.

Philippians 2:19–30

**A**s you may have picked up from the text, we are continuing with themes Paul has been talking about through this letter. With that in mind I have four very simple points this afternoon. A follower of Jesus puts others first. A follower of Jesus serves others. A follower of Jesus remains confident in God, even during trials. A follower of Jesus rejoices even when life is hard.

**T**here's not going to be anything too ground breaking in this message, more of a reminder of old truths. Things that may have become a little dusty and need some cleaning off. Like a treasure box which has been rarely opened, God wants to bring the jewels back into the light. The heirloom that has been put out of sight for too long, may its truths be set ablaze again in our hearts.

**I**f you'd like to know a little about me personally, I work in the movie industry. And one of the things I hear the most is that action packed, visual effects saturated movies often lack character development. We don't know the characters, and because of that we just don't care about them. Those movies that slow down enough to allow us to get to know the characters are often those movies we love the most. Those are the movies we remember. Older movie series like the 'Die Hard' or 'Lethal Weapon' spent serious time letting you get to know the characters. And more recently 'Ford vs. Ferrari' or 'Top Gun: Maverick' also did an excellent job in helping you care for the characters in the movie. When you have some backstory you care. And when you care you listen more closely, and watch more carefully.

**W**ith this in mind let me introduce you to Paul's two friends, Timothy and Epaphroditus. Timothy is a name we've heard before. In fact Paul starts the letter by writing, "Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus," (Philippians 1:1). Timothy was probably in his late-teens when he became a Christian, And joined Paul on his 2nd missionary journey when he was in his early 20's. And as time went on Paul and Timothy became close friends. Paul even describes Timothy as his 'spiritual son'. Epaphroditus on the other hand is a new name to us. In fact this is the only place he is mentioned in the whole of the New Testament. What we know about Epaphroditus is that he was sent as a messenger from the church in Philippi, bringing supplies to Paul. He was possibly a leader in the church, and is referred to by Paul as a follower of Jesus, a brother, a fellow worker, and soldier.

**O**k, so now we have a bit of information about Timothy and Epaphroditus let's look at our first point which is, A follower of Jesus puts others first. Paul tells us, "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others." (Philippians 2:3-4). And a little bit further on Paul saying, "I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon...". (Philippians 2:19). Here Paul is hoping, or 'looking forward with confidence', to send Timothy to the Philippians.

**T**his is Timothy, who Paul 'remembers constantly in his prayers night and day.' Who Paul loves as his own son. And had proven his worth as a witness to the gospel. Paul could have so easily put his needs first, But instead he put the needs of the Philippians before his own. Paul goes not to write, "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." (Philippians 2:21-23).

**P**aul had a plan which had been seriously interrupted. After all he was to take the gospel to the Gentiles. But now he was confined to prison. What could he do? But wait a minute, Paul has Timothy. Appointed to do the work of an evangelist. Trained by Paul himself to help spread the gospel. Apostolic padawan. Paul could of used Timothy to continue His mission. But no! Paul does not look to his own needs, instead he looks to the needs of others. Instead of keeping Timothy for himself he looks to send him off to the church in Philippi. And not only that, he also plans to send Epaphroditus. Paul is living out the Christian life by putting others first. Putting others before his own needs. And we see this over and over through-out Paul's life.

**I**f we just focus on this letter alone we see Paul's desire to "...depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account." (Philippians 1:23-24). Paul longs to be with Christ, to be out of the struggles of life out of hardships and temptation. But instead he will stay 'in the flesh' as he puts it and serve the Philippians. And we too, like Paul, are called to put others first. To think of the needs of others before ourselves. We are called not to love ourselves first but to love others first.

**I**f you do a quick search on the internet for 'loving yourself' we quickly see the world's point of view. Listen to just a few of the search results I came across, "If you take self-love out of your control and leave it in the hands of others, you will be disappointed." Or "When you love yourself, you live on another level, another plain of happiness." And "Loving yourself first is essential if you want to be happy and live your life with no regrets." And finally "It is impractical and wrong to make yourself suffer while trying to be there for others."

**H**ow different the world perceives love from that of the Bible. Jesus teaches us the great commandment is to, "...love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'" (Matthew 22:36-39). This kind of love, the kind of love that puts others first. This kind of love will change lives forever. So how are we putting others first in our lives? Are we looking around and thinking, "How can I make less of me, and more of others?"

**P**oint two, A follower of Jesus serves others. As we look throughout this letter we see a real spirit of serving each other. In verse 19 we read, "I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon." (Philippians 2:19). Here we see Paul serving the Philippians by sending them Timothy. Then in verse 22 we read, "But you know Timothy's proven worth, how as a son with a father he has served with me in the gospel." (Philippians 2:22). A few verses on we read of Paul serving the Philippians again in sending Epaphroditus, which leads into us having a glimpse of how the Philippians have been serving Paul. "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..." (Philippians 2:25).

**H**ere there is a real sense of serving one another, In going the extra mile to see that someone else is blessed. And there is no better place to see this than in Christ Himself. Earlier in verse 6 and 7 we read, "...though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant...". (Philippians 2:6-7). Here this word 'servant' in the Greek is 'doulos' which literally means 'slave'.

**G**od's only son, the creator of the heavens and earth, emptied himself for us, becoming a servant, a slave, so we may be free. The Creator of all things came to serve His creation. Came to serve those who had turned away from Him. Those who lived their lives in rebellion to Him. The God of all things, Jesus Christ, became a servant, so you and I may know hope, peace, and love. Instead of despair, fear and death. So how are we looking to serve others? How are we laying down our lives for those around us?

**P**oint three, A follower of Jesus remains confident in God even during trials. Throughout this passage we see Paul's unwavering confidence in God. Just look at the way Paul talks, Verse 19, "I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon...". Verse 24, "...I am confident in the Lord that I myself will come soon." And earlier in verse 23 we read, "I hope, therefore, to send him as soon as I see how things go with me." Paul looked to God with confidence, with the expectation that He will come through.

**P**aul isn't saying "let go and let God". He is making plans, but in those plans he is trusting. His assumption is that God will be faithful, that God can be trusted, that God's promises can be relied on. He prayed big prayers because he believed in a big God. He believes God's word and promises. And he believes that God wanted the best for him and the Philippians. Listen to some of the promises God has given us, "...seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. (Matthew 6:33). And "When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you." (Isaiah 43:2) And "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach, and it will be given him." (James 1:5). And one more... "Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful." (Hebrews 10:23).

**O**ur God is faithful. We can trust Him with whatever is happening in life. Weather you've been a Christian for years, or if you are here wondering "Is God real?" "Can I really be forgiven?" "Did Christ really pay for all my sins?" Yes, yes, yes! Trust in God and you will be saved. Listen to this story by the great English preacher Charles Spurgeon.

**M**any years ago my garden happened to be surrounded by a hedge, which looked green, but was a poor protection. A neighbour's dog was very fond of visiting my garden, and as he never improved my flowers I never gave him a cordial welcome. Walking along quietly one evening I saw him doing mischief. I threw a stick at him and advised him to go home; but how did the good creature reply to me? He turned round and wagged his tail, and in the merriest manner picked up my stick, and brought it to me, and laid it at my feet. Did I strike him? No, I am not a monster. I should have been ashamed of myself if I had not patted him on the back and told him to come there whenever he liked. He and I were friends directly, because you see he trusted me and conquered me. Now, simple as the story is, that is just the philosophy of a sinner's faith in Christ. As the dog mastered the man by confiding in him, so a poor guilty sinner does, in effect, master the Lord himself by trusting him, when he says, "Lord, I am a poor dog of a sinner, and thou mightest drive me away, but I believe thee to be too good for that. I believe thou canst save me, and lo! I trust myself with thee. Whether I am lost or saved, I trust myself with thee."

**I**n thinking about trust, we have the clearest picture in the life of Christ. After He had been at His most vulnerable, hanging on the cross, paying for our sins He cried out, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!" (Luke 23:46). He knew He'd accomplished His Father's will. He had been crushed for our iniquities. He had been chastised so that we could have peace. God had poured out the full fury of His wrath onto His own son. Our punishment had been paid in full. And when it was done, he trusted His Father. He trusted that God would be there for Him. And is that not the same for us? It doesn't matter what we have done, what we are going through, how hard our circumstances are. If we cry out to God He will be there for us. Even during the hardest moments of our lives God is with us. And he can be trusted. Let us hold onto His promises! Deuteronomy 31:6 tells us to, "Be strong and courageous. Do not fear... for it is the LORD your God who goes with you. He will not leave you or forsake you." So where in your life do you need to trust God today?

**L**astly, point four, A follower of Jesus rejoices even when life is hard. Despite the fact that Paul is potentially losing both Timothy and Epaphroditus to the Philippian church he remains joyful. Listen to his words, "I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, that I also may be cheered when I receive news about you." (Philippians 2:19). And then a bit later he says, "I am all the more eager to send him [Epaphroditus], so that when you see him again you may be glad and I may have less anxiety." (Philippians 2:28).

**T**he word Paul is using here for ‘rejoice’ is the same root word we find in the book of Hebrews, when the writer says, “Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross...”. (Hebrews 12:1–2). ‘For the joy set before Him’ doesn't mean Christ was happy about going to the cross, He was not looking forward to dying. For paying for the sins of you and I. Rather He was looking forward to all that lay ahead, How he would be, “raised him from the dead and seated [at God’s] right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion...”. (Ephesians 1:19–21). And how His father would “...highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord...”. (Philippians 2:9–11).

**T**his is the joy that was set before Him. And in God's wisdom and providence, like Christ, we too will have trials in this life. James reminds, "Consider it pure joy ... whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything." (James 1: 2-4). God has ordained these trails in our lives so we may grow up, be whole, and not missing anything God has for us. Through our trials we become more Christ-like!

**H**owever, suffering is not something to be made light of. And I know in a group this size there could be real struggles. But in your suffering, in your struggles, know this, Christ see you, He is with you, and He is in control. And the bible tells us one day we will see He face to face, and “He will wipe every tear from [our] eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain...”. (Revelation 21:4). We can rejoice in our suffering because Christ is with us, because He has suffered for us. We can rejoice in our suffering because when we are weak, He is strong. We life over-takes us, He will carry us through.

**A**s we draw to a close, listen to this well known and beautiful poem, Footprints, by Margaret Powers,

One night a man had a dream. He dreamed he was walking along the beach with the LORD. Across the sky flashed scenes from his life. For each scene he noticed two sets of footprints in the sand: one belonging to him, and the other to the LORD.

When the last scene of his life flashed before him, he looked back at the footprints in the sand. He noticed that many times along the path of his life there was only one set of footprints. He also noticed that it happened at the very lowest and saddest times in his life.

This really bothered him and he questioned the LORD about it: "LORD, you said that once I decided to follow you, you'd walk with me all the way. But I have noticed that during the most troublesome times in my life, there is only one set of footprints. I don't understand why when I needed you most you would leave me."

The LORD replied:

"My son, my precious child, I love you and I would never leave you. During your times of trial and suffering, when you see only one set of footprints, it was then that I carried you."

**S**o as we finish up let us remember, A follower of Jesus puts others first. A follower of Jesus serves others not themselves. A follower of Jesus remains confident in God even during trials. And a follower of Jesus rejoices even when life is hard.