

# Celebrating Ministry Partners

**Press On Series, October 24/25 | Philippians 2:19-30**  
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## TEAMS MAKE A DIFFERENCE.

### **Wyatt Earp took his team when he went to the OK Corral.<sup>1</sup>**

The town of Tombstone, Arizona, had been booming since silver was discovered nearby.

Still, it was the wild west, and the town had a reputation for being rough and lawless.

Wyatt Earp was drawn to the area, along with his brothers Virgil and Morgan, and his friend Doc Holliday. They were all hoping to strike it rich either in the silver mines or in business.

Earp and his team all had pasts that sometimes involved keeping the law and sometimes involved breaking it. This is where reality, fiction, and film all begin to blend together.

A feud was brewing in Tombstone between Earp's team and a band of outlaws known as the "cowboys."

In October 1881 an ordinance was passed in Tombstone prohibiting anyone from carrying guns in town. This didn't sit well with the "cowboys."

By this time, Virgil Earp had become the town marshal and was responsible for enforcing the ordinance and disarming anyone who came to town armed.

Arguments happened. Fights broke out. Virgil deputized his brothers and Doc Holliday.

Together, they met five of the "cowboys" in a lot near the OK Corral. Shots were fired, and the rest is history. There are plenty of lessons we *could* learn from the gunfight near the OK Corral. One of the things we need to see today is that it helps to have a team around you.

### **Teammates can make life better.**

We know this already. Very few people really need to be convinced that being surrounded by supportive people is a good thing.

Just so you know, studies have demonstrated the value of having friends or teammates.

The Mayo Clinic published an article that outlined the benefits of good friends.

Good friends help us to feel a sense of belonging, purpose, and self-confidence.

Good friends also help us to fight through bad times; they help us to reduce stress and process trauma in healthy ways.

Friends help us reduce high blood pressure, lose excess weight, and live longer.<sup>2</sup>

Friends and teammates can make life better.

### **Paul's teammates and friends made a big difference to him.**

Paul was surrounded by a large team. Already in Philippians we have heard about Timothy who co-wrote the book. We know that there were Christians in Rome with whom Paul interacted. We have also heard about other apostolic missionaries who were under Paul's leadership. We will hear today about

a man from Philippi named Epaphroditus who was with Paul in Rome. In Philemon 23-24 we find that the list of people in Rome at the time also likely included teammates and friends named Epaphras, Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, and Luke.

These folks practically helped Paul with the day-to-day details of his ministry and life in prison.

While we hear that some of Paul's teammates and friends failed him from time to time, we hear much more from Paul about how they encouraged him.

Today, we're going to look closely at two of them and see what we can learn from them.

## PAUL TOUTED TIMOTHY'S TALENTS.

### **Paul touted Timothy's talents in Philippians 2:19-24.**

*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. 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.*

### **Timothy felt like a son to Paul.**

Paul got to know him on his second missionary journey through Lystra in Central Turkey.

Timothy was the son of a Jewish-Christian mother and a Gentile, unbelieving father.

When Paul met Timothy, he was immediately impressed with the young man's faith and his talent. In fact, all the believers in the area were talking about Timothy at the time.

Paul invited Timothy to join him on his missionary journeys, an invitation Timothy accepted.

That began a multi-year partnership between the two men.

Over time, Paul taught Timothy everything he needed to know to grow in the faith and become a truly effective servant of Jesus.

Then in time, Paul began to trust Timothy to serve as his representative. Paul's letters contain multiple mentions of his sending Timothy to work in his place.<sup>3</sup>

Paul referred to Timothy as his brother, co-worker, and even here as his son in the faith.

Timothy served as the scribe for most of Paul's letters that have survived in the New Testament.

In fact, Paul dictated this very letter to Timothy.

Can you imagine what that experience must have been like? Paul, sitting in prison, accused of capital crimes, dictated an endorsement of Timothy to Timothy. Timothy heard this blessing and wrote it down to go to the church in Philippi. It must have been a tender moment.

### **Timothy would represent Paul to the people saints in Philippi.**

Paul planned to send this letter to the saints in Philippi.

Then, he wrote that he would send Timothy shortly and come himself to see them.

Of course, shortly really meant "as soon as possible." He hoped to send Timothy as soon as the situation in his life was secure enough that he could do without Timothy's help and encouragement.

Paul had to see how his court case came out before he could come himself.

But he longed to get news from Philippi.

Paul was sending a letter that he expected would give the saints in Philippi reason to think. He hoped that they would settle the conflicts they had.

Then he planned to send Timothy to see how his letter had been received.

This would be a form of accountability. Paul wanted to send Timothy to get the good news that the saints in Philippi were now stronger again by being united, and Paul wanted to have that news delivered to him in Rome. It would encourage him.

### **Timothy stood in stark contrast to many people Paul knew.**

Paul wrote in verses 20 and 21 that he had no one else like Timothy. Timothy had a high level of concern for the welfare of the saints in Philippi.

Many other people (okay, everyone else) he knew would seek their own interests, instead of those of the saints in Philippi.

In all likelihood, Paul is referring to the people from chapter 1 who he said were preaching Christ now that he was in prison out of their own selfish ambitions.

These folks were not living out Jesus' mindset that Paul taught in the rest of chapter 2.

They did not have the same mind as Jesus who emptied himself, humbled himself, and served people even to the point of death.

They did not apply that mindset the way Paul called the saints in Philippi to do by setting aside selfish ambition, vain conceit, grumbling, and disputing. They did not consider others as higher than themselves.

Paul could not endorse these folks by sending them to the saints in Philippi.

Nor could he let them into his own inner circle or team. There's a lesson here for us:

### ***We need Jesus' character, or our work becomes tainted.***

What we do with our lives is critically important.

It also turns out that *how* we do it and *why* we do it are important as well.

We can do big, important things, but if we don't do them with the mind of Christ, what we do becomes suspect and of less value.

Having a character flaw where we don't have the mind of Jesus makes us a little bit like chicken salad that's been sitting out for hours on a hot day.

We might look delicious and appetizing, but there's a good chance that we're toxic.

We need Jesus' character ourselves, and we want to surround ourselves with people who also have Jesus' character.

## **PAUL EXTOLLED EPAPHRODITUS' EFFORTS.**

### **Paul extolled Epaphroditus' efforts in Philippians 2:25-30.**

*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. 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.*

### **Epaphroditus worked like an apostle and a priest on behalf of the saints in Philippi.**

Before the letter was written, Epaphroditus arrived from Philippi.

He came to bring the financial gift that the saints in Philippi sent to provide for Paul.

The gift seems to have been large, so it is actually likely that Epaphroditus travelled with others for security and companionship.

Epaphroditus arrived, intending not only to give the gift so that Paul could pay his living expenses while in prison. Epaphroditus also planned to help with Paul's daily needs and ministry.

In verse 25, Paul called him the messenger or apostle of the saints in Philippi. He also called him their minister or priest, who took this work as a kind of religious devotion.

### **Epaphroditus now needed to go home with honor.**

It seems that, while in Rome taking care of Paul, Epaphroditus became ill.

Paul wrote that the illness was grave. Epaphroditus almost died.

Word reached Philippi that Epaphroditus was ill. In all likelihood, at least one member of the party that came with him returned to Philippi while Epaphroditus struggled for his life.

The saints in Philippi were distraught to hear that Epaphroditus was so ill. They assumed that he would die, because it was very rare for people in Paul's day to recover from serious illness.

However, God somehow miraculously intervened, and Epaphroditus was healed.

His recovery made Paul happy. He didn't want to see Epaphroditus suffer and die.

Now, though, Epaphroditus was worried about his friends back home. They were concerned and grieving, expecting that he was dead. Epaphroditus wanted to go home to comfort them.

So Paul was sending him along with this letter back to Philippi with his commendation.

### **Epaphroditus' experience reminds us that our bonds come with obligations.**

This is an unexpected theme in what Paul wrote to his benefactors in Philippi.

He wrote to express his gratitude for the large gift they gave him.

But what he wrote about Epaphroditus shows a different side of the issue.

He wrote extensively about the deep, family ties they shared with one another.

But then, when he wrote about Epaphroditus' visit, he wrote that the gift and Epaphroditus' visit were part of a duty that the saints in Philippi had to Paul.

In verse 30 he wrote that Epaphroditus came in person to fill up something that was missing and necessary about what they had provided to Paul.

The saints in Philippi had provided some or even all of the money that Paul needed, but they had not been able to provide the practical help he needed.

Epaphroditus came in person to make up what was lacking.

The idea that the saints in Philippi were lacking something is what's so surprising.

Their "gift" wasn't a "gift" after all. It was part of their obligation to Paul.

Paul and the saints in Philippi were family because of their mutual faith in Jesus. As family, they had the duty or obligation to provide for Paul.

To leave Paul without what he needed would break the nature of their relationship.

Why? Because being part of the fellowship of Christians comes with benefits and obligations.

***We share bonds that come with obligations.***

We are family to each other. As part of the church, we are brothers and sisters in Christ.

As brothers and sisters, we get tons of benefits.

We also have obligations. We owe each other love and respect. We owe it to each other to stand together, instead of walking away from each other. We owe each other help.

This is a season when I need to remind each one of us of our obligations to each other.

Part of our obligation to each other is to provide financially for the needs of our church and to give the needed resources to make sure that our church is able to operate and that our missionaries are able to continue doing their jobs on our behalf around the world.

Giving isn't just an add-on to our life together. Giving financially is one of those obligations that we have because we are all in this together.

So, let's all be good partners in ministry to each other right now and give generously.

## PARTNERS IN MINISTRY PUSH US TO PRESS ON.

**Paul's partners were living out Jesus' mindset from Philippians 2:1-11.**

Timothy and Epaphroditus were thinking exactly the way Jesus thought.

Paul wrote in those verses that Jesus didn't grasp after status, he emptied himself, he humbled himself, he served, and he was willing to die.

Timothy and Epaphroditus did just that. They set aside status, emptied themselves, served humbly, and were obviously willing to die.

Paul wrote that Jesus' mindset would lead Christians to set aside selfish ambition and conceit, put others before themselves, and avoid grumbling and disputing.

Timothy and Epaphroditus put Jesus' words into action.

Those are the kinds of partners in ministry we want and that we want to be.

**Paul's partners were also accomplishing Jesus' mission right alongside him.**

Timothy was helping Paul to stay in contact with all the churches he had started.

He even went as Paul's emissary to many of them.

History indicates that Timothy may have even become a significant leader (perhaps the bishop) of the large church in Ephesus, where he spent the rest of his life preaching and leading.

While Epaphroditus disappears from history after this letter was written, we get one brief, beautiful glimpse into his life.

Epaphroditus set aside whatever work he had to do to come as a representative of the saints in Philippi to ensure that Paul was cared for and that Paul could continue his essential work.

Epaphroditus clearly valued the mission of Jesus and was willing to stand behind the scenes making sure that the work could continue. Jesus' mission was his mission as well.

We want partners in ministry who value Jesus' mission, who will accomplish Jesus' mission right alongside us, who will push us to keep at the mission, who will call us back when we get off track, and who will celebrate with us when Jesus' mission is thriving. We want those kinds of partners in ministry, and we want to be those kinds of partners in ministry.

***We need partners in ministry who push us to press on.***

We need people around us who are part of the family. We need people around us who share our values and beliefs.

We need these people us to encourage us and build us up. Why? Because while the Holy Spirit is powerfully able to sustain us sovereignly and miraculously, God has designed us such that some of our encouragement, sustenance, and growth comes from the work of other followers of Jesus in our lives.

We need people around us who will focus us on the ministry God has given us to do. We would rather live comfortable lives where we are the center of attention. We need people around us to push us to grow and do ministry. Otherwise, we will give up over time.

We need partners in ministry around us who will not only help us but push us to press on.

So how will we get these people? One concrete step you can take is to join a group here at Valley. There are lots of ways to join a group, and I'd like to encourage you to do it the right way.

## FIVE STEPS TO JOINING A GROUP THE RIGHT WAY.

### **1. Join a group.**

If you're new to Valley, you don't know how many different groups we have or how many ways are available to join groups.

We have groups of different sizes: communities (which are big groups), small groups, and very small groups of just about three people.

We have classes (those are short-term groups), newer groups, and groups that have been meeting for years.

If there isn't a group that meets your needs, it may be time to start a new group!

### **2. Evaluate your group.**

I've just explained to you what true partners in ministry look like.

This is the grid we all want to put on our groups to evaluate them.

Do the people in the group demonstrate that they think like Jesus?

Do the people in the group live like Jesus?

Do the people in the group share in the mission that Jesus has given to us?

And do the people in the group encourage us to think, live, and work like Jesus?

I pray that, after you join a group and evaluate it, you will have gotten it right.

However, the people in your group may not be all you need or want them to be right away.

What should you do then?

### **3. Don't jump ship.**

Remember: we are family to each other.

That means we should not be quick to walk away from each other. Ever.

I want to share a little secret with you: we are all broken. We're all sinful. We're all flawed. It sounds crass, but we're all crazy. I've learned that lesson the hard way.

If you allow yourself to get to know the people around you, you will eventually come to the inescapable conclusion that the people around you are broken, sinful, flawed, and crazy.

Why? Because everyone is! And, as Christ followers, we have to learn to love broken, sinful, flawed, crazy people. That's the bad news.

Are you ready for the good news? You're broken, sinful, flawed, and crazy, too. And if you keep on loving broken, sinful, flawed, crazy people, some of them will come to you too.

So, don't jump ship when you realize that your group is filled with imperfect people.

#### **4. Don't become a pirate.**

Don't cast blame on the people in your group for being less than you want them to be.

Don't divide people in the group or cause conflict within the group. Instead...

#### **5. Become the partner in ministry you need.**

Push yourself to think like Jesus. Push yourself to live like Jesus. Push yourself to do the work of Jesus. You may need training and mentoring in it at first.

Then push the people around you to press on. Show them the way Jesus thinks, live the way Jesus wants you to live, and do the work of Jesus in front of them. Invite them to join you. Encourage them by your words and actions to press on.

How does that help you? Pushing the people around you to think like Jesus, live like Jesus, and work like Jesus will reshape you and make you into the partner in ministry Paul described today.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/history/magazine/2020/03-04/what-happened-gunfight-ok-coral/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/adult-health/in-depth/friendships/art-20044860>

<sup>3</sup> See 1 Thessalonians 3:15, 1 Corinthians 4:17, and 1 Corinthians 16:10-11.