

**Get Risky for God**  
**Philippians 2:19-30**  
**Part 5—Choose Joy**

**Introduction**

I don't know about you, but it's easy for me to forget that the letters in the New Testament were first written as real letters. They deal with real life and real people—but I can forget that. I mean I don't write emails that sound anything like Paul's letter to the church in Rome! My emails are more mundane. I talk about my family, the weather and maybe how my ministry is going. So, it's easy for me to forget that Paul's letter, for example, to the Philippians was first written as a letter to his friends in Philippi.

But today's passage reminds us that Paul lived a real life; he was writing amid real circumstances; and he was surrounded by real people. Today we consider Philippians 2:19-30. This is the fifth week in our series: Choose Joy. This is the most down-to-earth passage we've seen, thus far. It deals with real life and real people. Follow along in your sermon notes as we read the passage.

*<sup>19</sup> I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, that I also may be cheered when I receive news about you. <sup>20</sup> I have no one else like him, who will show genuine concern for your welfare. <sup>21</sup> For everyone looks out for their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. <sup>22</sup> 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. <sup>23</sup> I hope, therefore, to send him as soon as I see how things go with me. <sup>24</sup> And I am confident in the Lord that I myself will come soon.*

*<sup>25</sup> 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. <sup>26</sup> For he longs for all of you and is distressed because you heard he was ill. <sup>27</sup> 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. <sup>28</sup> 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. <sup>29</sup> So then, welcome him in the Lord with great joy, and honor people like him, <sup>30</sup> 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.*

In verse 19 Timothy is re-introduced. You may recall Timothy was mentioned in the first verse of the letter. He joined Paul's traveling missionary team just before they arrived in Philippi. From that point on, Paul and Timothy were ministry companions. At the time Philippians was written, they had served together for about ten years. Their relationship was special. More than likely, Paul was the one who led Timothy to faith in Christ and he was Timothy's most influential mentor.

The text indicates Paul hoped to send Timothy to visit the Philippians. Remember that Paul was under house arrest in Rome. As a result, he wasn't free to travel. He was

chained to a Roman soldier. But he was still concerned about the Philippians. Ten years earlier Paul had planted the church and he still cared about it. He wanted to know how his friends were doing; what was going on; if the gospel was taking root in the surrounding areas.

In 2 Corinthians 11 Paul catalogues many of the difficulties he faced as an apostle. At the end of the list he adds, “Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches.” This pressure weighed on Paul. He loved God’s people and he loved God’s church!

I can identify with this because of our experiences in Chile and Nevada. We planted a number of churches while we in Chile. Because of that, I’m always eager to hear how they’re doing, what’s going on, how’s so-and-so doing? The same is true with Summit. Pam and rejoice greatly that the church is doing better than ever. But if anything went awry, it would concern us because we love those people. That’s what Paul refers to in verse 19. He wants to be cheered by news from God’s work in Philippi.

And he wants to send Timothy as his messenger. Why? Look again at verse 20. Paul had no one else like Timothy. Paul uses a Greek word that’s found only here in the New Testament. Literally it means *“equal-souled”* or *“one-souled.”* It refers to people who are like-minded; they have a kindred spirit.

In the constellation of Paul’s relationships no one else reflected his heart for God and his heart for people quite like Timothy. Timothy was a kindred spirit with Paul. He was someone Paul could count on to always look out for the interests of others. Paul knew from experience that Timothy shared his burden for all the churches—including the church in Philippi.

On top of that, in verse 22 Paul says Timothy had proven himself. The word refers to proven character or tested value. By that point, Timothy had served faithfully in the work of the gospel for about ten years. Throughout that decade, in the crucible of real-life challenges, Timothy had proven to be faithful, reliable and trustworthy.

One of the most influential books about leadership that I’ve ever read is called The Making of a Leader. I studied under the author, Bobby Clinton, at Fuller Theological Seminary. In the book Bobby identifies a number of ways that God tests leaders as they’re developing. For example, God will orchestrate circumstances to test a leader’s integrity. Bobby calls this an integrity check. If the aspiring leader fails to pass, God will recycle the test until he or she gets it right. If the emerging leader doesn’t pass the test, then God won’t promote that person to any higher level of leadership. Clinton identifies dozens of ways that God shapes leaders with things like the integrity check.

Timothy successfully ran the gauntlet of those God-ordained leadership tests. He had proven himself faithful. He was a man who could be trusted. As a result, Paul writes in verse 23, “I hope, therefore, to send him as soon as I see how things go with me.” Thus, Paul wants to send Timothy to the Philippians because of his kindred spirit and because

he was a man of proven character. It appears Paul was also hopeful that he would be released soon so he could visit himself. We pick this up in verse 24. “And I am confident in the Lord that I myself will come soon.”

We see in this passage that Paul and Timothy enjoyed a father-son spiritual relationship.

- Timothy had been mentored by Paul.
- Timothy carried Paul’s spiritual DNA.
- He cared for people like Paul.
- He loved God like Paul.
- He was concerned about God’s work like Paul.
- He probably prayed like Paul. In other words, Paul’s spiritual life was reproduced through his influence on Timothy’s life.

When I look back over my shoulder, I can see a long string of men who poured their lives into me. Throughout my spiritual journey I’ve had a series of men who have been mentors. Each one passed along something significant. It’s like each one hammered into my soul one or two pieces of spiritual timber making me who I am today. Their names form my own personal hall of faith: Sheldon, Ben, Les, Roger, Fred, Ki-Sung, Eduardo, Angel, Santiago, Bobby, Ed, Tim and Chris.

I stand on the shoulders of each of those men. I feel a sense of debt, so I’m trying to pass along to others what I’ve received. One of the things I was most proud of in my ministry at Summit were the dozen or so men that I ordained into full-time ministry. These men came from all walks of life and I was able to put a small thumb print on their lives by calling them into vocational ministry.

Now here’s my question for you: Are you spiritually mentoring anyone? Sometimes I think people get wigged out when we use the term mentor. Being a mentor sounds too lofty, too complicated, too hard. But guess what? It’s not that difficult. A few years ago, before the idea of mentoring became popular, Christians talked about being discipled. Or they talked about discipling other people. Basically, discipling is spiritual mentoring.

Spiritual mentoring is living your Christian life and bringing someone along with you. It doesn’t mean we’re perfect. It doesn’t mean we have it all together. But it does mean we’re bringing someone along with us as we grow spiritually ourselves. I think all of us can do that! Are you? In the constellation of your relationships is there anyone that’s being marked with your spiritual fingerprints?

Spiritual mentoring doesn’t have to be complicated. It’s just living your Christian life and bringing someone along with you. But Spiritual mentoring requires three things:

1. Get close-To spiritually mentor someone you have to get close to them. This is one reason why Rooted Groups and Belonging Groups are so helpful. Being in a group allows you to get close to a few people so you can influence them.

2. Get consistent—By this I mean spiritual mentoring requires getting close to someone with enough frequency so your life begins to rub off on them. That's why getting together with the person consistently—regularly—is important. Once again, Rooted Groups and Belonging Groups provide that consistency in a very natural way.
3. Get real. To spiritually mentor someone they need to peek behind the curtain of your life. They need to see the real you—not the perfect you—the real you. Your authenticity will help to fuel the impact of the mentoring process.

Paul left his imprint on Timothy's life. Imagine the impact that had! Timothy went on to do wonderful things for the Lord—including pastoring the large and influential church in Ephesus. When we're a positive spiritual influence in someone's life, we never know where it might lead.

Several years ago, we had David Beamer speak at Summit. David was the father of Todd Beamer who became one of the heroes on 9/11. Todd helped to foil the hijackers by bringing down United flight 93 before it was crashed into the White House. David said his son became a hero because of the influence of scores of spiritual mentors. These were Sunday School teachers, youth workers, Christian coaches and school teachers. You never know the impact your life might make on someone else...if you reach out and try to touch them.

A few years ago, I received a surprising letter in the mail. It was from a Swedish man named Hans. Somehow Hans had tracked down my address on the Internet. He was writing to thank me for my influence in his life. Now, quite honestly, when I began to read the letter, I had absolutely no clue who he was. But, in the letter, Hans said that while I was in Sweden in Bible school in 1976, my small group went to a night club to share about Christ. Personally, I have no recollection of that night. But apparently, we shared the gospel with Hans and he received Christ.

Then, to my great surprise, Hans went on to say that he ended up going to Bible school himself. Along the way he met a Christian wife. Then they went to India for ten years as missionaries. At the time he wrote the letter, Hans was serving as a pastor of a local church in Canada. I had no idea any of that had happened. Hans wrote the letter to thank me on the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his decision to accept Christ—at a night club in Sweden with a group of wet-behind-the-ears very young evangelists.

Friend, you never know the impact your life might make...if you try. So, one more time, here's my question: Are you spiritually mentoring anyone? Are you leaving your spiritual imprint on anyone else? It's not complicated: it's just living your Christian life and bringing someone along with you.

Getting back to our passage in Philippians, in verse 25 we're introduced to a second person: Epaphroditus. Remember this letter deals with real life and real people. Later on in the letter we learn that Epaphroditus had been sent by the Philippians to help Paul.

Epaphroditus brought financial support so Paul could buy food and the other things he needed. Evidently the Philippians had confidence in Epaphroditus. After all, they trusted him with their financial gifts.

I want you to notice the four labels given to Epaphroditus in verse 25. You might circle these in your notes:

- *My brother*-Circle that. In other words, Epaphroditus was a genuine brother in Christ. Paul calls him “my” brother reflecting a close bond of fellowship between them.
- *Co-worker*-Circle that. Epaphroditus worked shoulder-to-shoulder with Paul to extend the gospel.
- *Fellow soldier*-Epaphroditus fought alongside Paul against the spiritual forces of darkness.
- *Messenger*-He had been a faithful messenger from the Philippians with their gifts to Paul.

When I read these labels, it makes me wonder about how God might label me. Do you ever think about that? How would God label you? How would God summarize your life? Often kings in the OT are given just a line or two of acknowledgement. Their entire lifetime is summed up in a few brief words. Epaphroditus may have lived 60 or 70 years. But his life is summarized for us in four short words: brother, co-worker, soldier and messenger. That’s quite a legacy, isn’t it?

Some of you know that I’m a neat-nick. I like the top of my desk to be free from clutter and I like the mower lines in my lawn to be straight. Years ago, there was a movie made called *The Old Couple* about a neat-nick named Felix Unger and his messy roommate. I’ve often thought my family might put something like this on my tombstone:

*Here lies Steve neat and tidy*  
*Just like Felix Unger*  
*But now he’s six feet under*

When I think about that, it makes me chuckle. But I hope—I really hope—that my legacy will have more substance than just being neat and tidy. What about you? How do you think God would summarize your life up to this point? What labels would God use to summarize your life? Faithful? Teachable? Committed? Servant? Loving? Kind?

From what I know about God’s love and grace, I think he’s far more generous with his labels than we imagine. When God looks at us through the blood-stained cross, I don’t think he notices the foibles and crud that we get hung up on. I think the two labels he uses most for us are my beloved and my child.

But I think many of us have a hard time believing that. Even though Scripture repeats it over and over, deep down, many of us still question our value in God’s eyes. We still wonder if he loves us; if we really do matter to the God who created the universe.

I've discovered the best way to change this doubt-filled thinking is by disciplining my thought-life. Our thoughts lead to words which lead to actions which lead to habits which end up shaping our destiny. Thus, the best way to change the outcome of our lives—the best way to influence our destiny—is by changing our thoughts. With that in mind, the Bible encourages us to take captive every thought and make it obedient to Christ. This, more than anything else, will upscale our joy factor.

During this series, we've been trying to take captive every thought and make it obedient to Christ by memorizing Philippians 4:8. Have you learned it yet? Are you repeating it several times a day? I hope so! Let's say it out loud together. If you have it memorized you might close your eyes and not look at the screen. "Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things."

Once we begin thinking correctly about God and about ourselves, we won't worry much about the labels God might use for us. Why? Because right thinking will lead to right words and actions—and the rest will take care of itself.

In verses 26-30 we learn that Epaphroditus had become very ill. He may have fallen ill on the journey to reach Paul, or it may have happened while he was in Rome. We don't know. Verse 27 says he was so sick that he almost died. One thing interesting about this is that Paul apparently wasn't able to heal Epaphroditus. The text suggests that he got better naturally, not by supernatural healing. In the book of Acts chapter 28 God uses Paul to heal several folks. But, apparently, he didn't have this same healing power with Epaphroditus.

Somehow, the folks back in Philippi heard that Epaphroditus nearly died. This news distressed them which then caused Epaphroditus to be concerned. As a result, Paul was sending Epaphroditus back home. Notice verse 28. "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." It's entirely possible that Epaphroditus was the messenger who carried Paul's letter to the Philippians.

Paul encourages the Philippians to welcome him back with great joy. They were to honor men like him because he almost died for the work of Christ. In verse 30 Paul says that Epaphroditus *"risked his life"* for the cause of Christ. The Greek word for risking literally means *"to throw aside."* It speaks of voluntarily putting oneself in harm's way; exposing oneself to danger for the work of Christ.

Soon after the New Testament times a group of Christians banded together in an association they called *"the Gamblers."* That name was based on the Greek word for risking found in verse 30. They used Epaphroditus as their model. They visited prisoners in jail and ministered to the sick...especially those with dangerous diseases that no one else would help. This group—the Gamblers—boldly proclaimed the gospel of Jesus Christ wherever they went.

In today's message, so far, I've asked you to consider two things. The first was this: Are you spiritually mentoring anyone? Are you leaving your spiritual fingerprints on anyone's life? Who are you bringing along with you in your spiritual journey? The second question was this: What labels would God use to summarize your life? Are you allowing Scripture to transform your thinking so that your words and actions are more pleasing to God?

A third consideration comes from the example of Epaphroditus, who risked his life—he almost died—for the cause of Christ. Here's the question: Have you recently risked anything for Christ?

Time is our most precious commodity in today's world. Have you risked investing any time for the cause of Christ? Money is a close second. Have you risked investing—maybe investing lavishly—to advance God's purposes? Epaphroditus put himself in harm's way; he exposed himself to danger, to advance the gospel. What about you: have you ever risked something to reach a lost soul?

One my all-time favorite faith heroes is Jim Elliott. In 1956, along with four other missionaries, Jim attempted to reach the Auca Indians with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The Aucas lived in the middle of the Amazon jungle in Ecuador. They were a fierce tribe who avoided all contact with modern society. As they attempted to share the gospel, Jim and his four colleagues were speared to death by the Aucas on a sandy beach. They risked everything; they gave their lives for the cause of Christ.

Years earlier while Jim was a student at Wheaton College, he penned these immortal words: "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep, to save what he cannot lose." Let me ask the question one more time: Have you recently risked anything to advance the cause of Christ?