

When God called me to start a church in 1994, it was just me, Debbie and the kids. I didn't know much about church planting, having more of a background in electronics and computers. We did everything that was needed at the time, Deb and I taught Sunday School, I balanced the books, was maintenance man and janitor; we did youth ministry and nursery.

Over the years God grew His church and added people who had a willing heart to serve Him and His people but giving up ministry for me was hard to do.

I was a perfectionist who didn't want to give God anything less than the excellence that He deserved. I was the kind of person who would do a chore or project myself rather than trust its outcome to another—especially when it's a very important job that needs to be done.

When it comes to the ministry—you don't just want anyone to do it—you want people whose hearts beat with God's. You don't want just anyone in the nursery with your children—you don't just want anyone working with the youth of the teens.

We don't just allow anyone to stand in the pulpit just because they claim they are a preacher—we are not going to allow just anyone come and be our new music director just because they can play the piano.

When it came to shepherding the flock of God in Philippi, Paul wasn't going to just let anyone take on this important and critical assignment.

In 1st Timothy Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, gives us the qualifications for an elder who would serve as overseer and pastor:

1 Tim 3:1 This is a faithful saying: If a man desires the position of a bishop, he desires a good work.

1 Tim 3:2 A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, temperate, sober-minded, of good behavior, hospitable, able to teach;

1 Tim 3:3 not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but gentle, not quarrelsome, not covetous;

1 Tim 3:4 one who rules his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence

1 Tim 3:5 (for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?);

1 Tim 3:6 not a novice, lest being puffed up with pride he fall into the same condemnation as the devil.

1 Tim 3:7 Moreover he must have a good testimony among those who are outside, lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.

So we find in Philippians chapter two that Paul is letting the Philippian church know that he is sending Timothy to them. Paul of course is in under house arrest as he awaits a trial in Caesar's court. He is stuck in Rome; he cannot go anywhere. He is chained to a Roman guard. While his heart is with the Philippian church—his body is under lock and key.

Since Paul can't be in Philippi to check up on the state of the church that God used him to start, he sends a young man named Timothy.

Phil 2:19 But I trust in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you shortly, that I also may be encouraged when I know your state.

In 1 Timothy 1:2, Paul refers to Timothy as “*a true son in the faith.*” In 1 Corinthians 4:17, he calls him, “*my beloved and faithful son in the Lord...*” The use of these kinds descriptions probably means that Paul led Timothy into a relationship with Jesus Christ.

The Bible says that when Timothy was a child, his mother Eunice and his grandmother Lois taught him the Scriptures (2 Tim. 1:5; 3:15).

When Paul came to Lystra on his second missionary journey, Acts 16:1-2 tells us that Timothy was a disciple who was well-respected by the believers. Because of this, Paul asked Timothy to accompany him.

Timothy's father was Greek and Timothy had not been circumcised. Because they would be ministering to many Jews and because Timothy's mother was Jewish, Paul had Timothy circumcised (Acts 16:3).

Timothy not only accompanied Paul in his travels but he was also sent on many crucial missions by Paul. For example, when Paul was unable to go to Corinth, he sent Timothy to represent him (Acts 17:14-15; 18:5; 19:22; 20:4; Rom. 16:21; 1 Cor. 16:10; 2 Cor. 1:19; 1 Thess. 3:2, 6; 1 Cor. 4:17).

1 Corinthians 4:17 says, “*For this reason I have sent Timothy to you, who is my beloved and faithful son in the Lord, who will remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach everywhere in every church.*”

When Paul heard that Timothy was having problems with his stomach, he encouraged Timothy to take the proper medication—“*No longer drink only water, but use a little wine for your stomach's sake and your frequent infirmities.*” (1 Timothy 5:23)

Paul also remained a part of Timothy's life in order to rebuke and reprove him. When Timothy was experiencing a moment of weakness in the ministry, Paul exhorted his son in the faith:

“... I remind you to stir up the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands. ⁷For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind. (1 Timothy 1:6-7)

So close were Paul and Timothy that both names are listed as the authors of six of Paul's letters (2 Cor. 1:1; Phil. 1:1; Col. 1:1; 1 Thess. 1:1; 2 Thess. 1:1; Philem. 1). In addition, Paul wrote two letters to Timothy (1 Tim. 1:2; 2 Tim. 1:2).

As Paul's ministry neared the end, he challenged Timothy to remain true to his calling. His words were, “*This charge I commit to you, son Timothy, according to the prophecies previously made concerning you, that by them you may wage the good warfare...*” (1 Tim. 1:18).

In 2nd Timothy chapter 2 Paul urges Timothy to pass the torch that Paul had given him to others.

2 Tim 2:1 You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.

2 Tim 2:2 And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.

In chapter four of this same letter, as Paul faced execution in Rome, he asked Timothy to come to be with him (4:9). He had a special relationship with Timothy; He was Timothy's spiritual father.

By the way, do you have a spiritual son or daughter? Are there Christians who you could say you are their spiritual father or mother?

Paul didn't just lead people to Christ and then go on to the next project. He stayed connected with those whom God allowed to be his spiritual sons.

2nd Timothy is one of the last letters Paul would write before he would be executed in Rome for preaching the Gospel. In chapter 4 you can sense his heart's passion as he closes this letter to Timothy.

As he writes, he is in prison for preaching the Gospel. He was arrested as a common criminal, put in a dark, cold dungeon. He is alone, awaiting an execution that would sever his head from the rest of his body. In his solitude, Paul pen's these heartfelt thoughts to his son and protégé, Timothy:

¹I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom: ²Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. ³For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; ⁴and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables. ⁵But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.

⁶For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand. ⁷I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. ⁸Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.

Timothy was more than a project of the great Apostle Paul. He was more than a notch on Paul's spiritual gun belt. He was Paul's son in the faith.

Who is mentoring you in the things of Jesus Christ? In the Bible we find many examples of where God paired two or more people together for the purpose of discipleship. Here are a few of those examples:

Timothy had Paul	Mark had Barnabas
Moses had Jethro	Joshua had Moses
Elisha had Elijah	Samuel had Saul
King Jehoash had Elisha	Nebuchadnezzar had Daniel
Ester had Mordecai	The Apostles had Jesus
Titus had Paul	

Paul mentored Timothy. He was Timothy's spiritual father.

In our text, Paul needed someone to send to the Philippian church to care for them, to continue the work He started and wasn't able to personally complete because of his imprisonment. So Paul has plans to send Timothy.

In Philippians 2:20 Paul writes, *“For I have no one like-minded, who will sincerely care for your state.”*

“Like-minded” – The word likeminded is the translation of a Greek word made up of the two words, “equal” and “soul.” Paul was saying that he doesn't have a person in Rome with a soul equal to Timothy's.

“Sincerely care” – The same word used later in 4:6 where Paul writes, *“Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God...”*

These words let us know that shepherding God's flock is not merely a vocation; its not just a job; it's not just coming in and being an overseer—the head honcho of a church; it is a calling on your life by the Lord.

Shepherding is a ministry to the sheep—it is caring for them; nurturing them; teaching them; admonishing them; sacrificing for them. Paul needed one who sincerely cared for the welfare of the Philippians and that person was Timothy.

In the midst of the first century church, like today, there were people in the church that were more concerned for themselves rather than God's sheep. Paul brings this out in verse 21:

Phil 2:21 For all seek their own, not the things which are of Christ Jesus.

It is very difficult to know what Paul is specifically referring to in verse 21. We can speculate to a certain degree to say that Paul is referring to men who weren't focused on the ministry. They were seeking their own things, not the things of Christ.

Could it be that Paul is referring to men like Demas, who in Colossians 4:14 greets the Colossian church along with the physician Luke at the end of that letter. Demas was there along with Luke ministering to Paul while he was in prison.

However, sometime later, in 2 Timothy chapter four, Paul writes to Timothy in what is presumably his last correspondence before he is executed for the Gospel. In this letter he laments with these words:

“Be diligent to come to me quickly; for Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world, and has departed for Thessalonica...”

(2 Tim. 4:9-11)

Perhaps Paul was thinking about sending Demas to the Philippians but he noticed that Demas was hardly ever focused on the ministry.

- Paul had a hard time discipling Demas. He gave him assignments in the Bible to read and study and to write a paper on but Demas always had excuses for not doing the assignment.

- It was like “pulling teeth” for Paul to convince Demas to go down to the river to refill the eater jugs but Demas had no problem traveling to attend the latest Gladiator Challenge that was going on at the Coliseum.
- Demas was never available when Paul needed him especially during the Gazelle hunting season.
- Others gave money toward the expenses that Paul had while in prison at Rome but Demas always seemed to have an excuse. But he managed to have the money to purchase a brand new, 61 Turbo-charged, double-humped camel.

Paul writes, “*for Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world, and has departed for Thessalonica...*”

The Greek word from which we get our English word “desert” or “forsaken” here in this text *egkatalieipo*, according to Dr. Kenneth S. Wuest means “to abandon, desert, leave in straits, leave helpless, leave in the lurch, let one down” (*Wuest’s Word Studies from the Greek NT*, vol. 2, p. 164).

Dr. Wuest goes on to say, “This tells us that Demas had not only left Paul so far as fellowship was concerned, but he had left him in the lurch also, so far as the work of the gospel was concerned” (*ibid*). This is a very strong word in Greek, much stronger than our English rendition may denote. ”

Demas leaves Paul and travels to the city of Thessalonica. The city of Thessalonica, at this time was a great mercantile center and one of the great cities of the empire. I imagine that it was not unlike our New York City or Los Angeles.

Back in Philippians Paul informs his readers that he was going to send Timothy because there was no one like-minded who will sincerely care for their welfare.

Philippi was around 700 miles from Rome and while Paul certainly had friends in Rome, he couldn’t find any one who was willing to make that 700-mile trip to Philippi with the letter Paul was writing; the letter we are studying today.

In verses 22-24 Paul writes that Timothy had proved himself not only to Paul, but to the Philippian believers. Timothy had a track record of faithfulness and so Paul would send Timothy to them just as soon as he figured out how it would go with himself.

If Paul would be released from house arrest there would be no need to send Timothy—he would go himself but if God was not ready for him to be released, he would send Timothy.

To Single Moms...

Before we go on I would like to speak to the single moms. I would also like to speak to the mothers of boys who live in a home where the father is not following Christ.

The life of Timothy shows us how God can take a young person, save him and grow him up in Jesus—regardless of the fact that he had no male Christian influence.

Paul was Timothy’s mentor, Timothy was Paul’s disciple. But Paul wasn’t the only one responsible for nurturing him in the faith; it was Timothy’s *mother* and *grandmother*.

*(2 Tim 1:3 NKJV) I thank God, whom I serve with a pure conscience, as my forefathers did, as without ceasing I remember you in my prayers night and day,
(2 Tim 1:4 NKJV) greatly desiring to see you, being mindful of your tears, that I may be filled with joy,
(2 Tim 1:5 NKJV) when I call to remembrance the genuine faith that is in you, which dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and I am persuaded is in you also.*

Let me say something here. If you read through this passage in 2 Timothy chapter one, you will find no mention of Timothy's father. He was either dead or deadbeat.

Timothy received his spiritual legacy from his grandmother and mother. This tells us that we can't always blame the behavior of our children on the fact that there is no man around the house.

Later in 2 Timothy 3:14-15 Paul further exhorts Timothy, *"But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus."*

Timothy was taught the Scriptures from a child. What are you teaching your children?

- Many of our kids know all the latest raps and the latest dance moves.
- They know the top 12 American Idol finalist.
- They know their way around on YouTube; FaceBook and MySpace
- They know how to program their smart phones and load apps on their iPods.

Timothy's grandmother Lois reared her daughter Eunice in the things of the Lord. Her love as a mother preserved her daughter so that she might do the will of God. Eunice, Timothy's mother, taught her son the Holy Scriptures, which brought him to faith in Jesus Christ.

Now Timothy is on the battlefield for the Lord. He is a servant of the Lord; He is Paul's son in the faith and now someone who has "stepped up to the plate" to serve Paul and the Philippian believers.

Epaphroditus Praised

Now while Paul wasn't sure if he was going need to send Timothy, he had already made up his mind about sending another servant of the Lord whose name was Epaphroditus.

Phil 2:25 Yet I considered it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother, fellow worker, and fellow soldier, but your messenger and the one who ministered to my need;

Epaphroditus was a resident of Philippi—he had made the 700-mile trip from Philippi to Rome and now Paul was sending him back home. In verse 25 Paul gives a three-point description Epaphroditus. Paul refers to him as:

- 1.) "My brother." – Speaks of affection
- 2.) "a fellow worker" – Speaks of hard work
- 3.) "a fellow soldier" – Speaks of conflict

While Timothy was like a son to Paul, Epaphroditus was a close friend and comrade. And while I certainly believe that Epaphroditus loved Paul, his love for Paul wasn't what motivated him to do ministry.

Paul refers to Epaphroditus a "fellow worker" and a "fellow soldier" so Paul is speaking of the fellowship they shared a synergistic relationship in the *things of Christ*. Paul was motivated in ministry by his love for Jesus Christ and so was Epaphroditus.

Paul goes on in verse 25 to describe Epaphroditus as their "messenger." The Philippian church had sent Epaphroditus on a 700-mile journey to Rome to update Paul on the affairs of their church.

According to Philippians 4:18, the Philippian church sent some money along with Epaphroditus to assist Paul with his living expenses.

What did Epaphroditus do before he volunteered for this trip? The Scriptures doesn't say. Perhaps Epaphroditus was just a courier—like the FedEx or UPS man. He could have delivered the letter and the money and waited for Paul to give him a return letter. We don't know. But Scripture lets us know that he went the "second mile" and ministered to Paul's needs.

At the end of verse 25 Paul says that "*he ministered to my needs.*" I believe that Epaphroditus did the menial chores that needed to be done where Paul lived under house arrest—he made the bed, cleaned the room, cooked the food, served the food, emptied the garbage, etc.

What makes this more interesting is that Bible Teacher J. Vernon McGee believes that Epaphroditus was the pastor of the Philippian church. Can you imagine some of our pastors today doing menial chores?

Praise the Lord for the people at GraceWay Church who are willing to go the second mile. It has been said that we are the small church that does big things for the Lord and it takes people who are willing, like Epaphroditus, to wear several hats of ministry to do big things for the Lord.

Epaphroditus traveled 700 miles from Philippi to Rome to deliver a message to Paul from his church and then he stays to perform a personal ministry to Paul. But then something goes wrong.

Paul writes in verse 25-26, "*Yet I considered it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother, fellow worker, and fellow soldier, but your messenger and the one who ministered to my need; since he was longing for you all, and was distressed because you had heard that he was sick.*"

Epaphroditus got sick. Now he just didn't come down with the common cold or a stomach virus and got over it after several days—the Bible says that Epaphroditus "*was sick almost unto death.*"

How did he get sick? Epaphroditus could have gotten sick from traveling the 700 miles from Philippi to Rome or he could have become sick sometime after arriving in Rome. Maybe Epaphroditus got sick from all the work he was doing for Paul.

The Scripture doesn't say how he got sick; all it says is that he got sick and his illness almost caused him to die.

Phil 2:27 For indeed he was sick almost unto death; but God had mercy on him, and not only on him but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow.

Praise the Lord for God's mercy! God heals Epaphroditus! But there are a few things we need to mention here.

- 1.) Epaphroditus was a faithful servant of God but he still got sick and almost died. This tells us that when a saint gets sick it isn't always because of sin in that person's life.
- 2.) Epaphroditus got sick and it wasn't because he didn't have *faith*. Epaphroditus must have had a lot of faith or he wouldn't have been willing to travel to Rome to minister to the Apostle Paul.

Remember, Caesar had Paul under house arrest for serious crimes against the state. Now we need to know about how the Roman government viewed Christianity at this time.

R.C. Sproul writes, "The loyalty oath required by Roman citizens to demonstrate their allegiance to the empire in general and to the emperor in particular was to say publicly, "***Kaisar Kurios***," that is, "*Caesar is lord*."

Sproul says, "In the first-century church, Christians bent over backward to be obedient to civil magistrates, including the oppressive measures of Caesar, and yet, when it came to making the public affirmation that Caesar is lord, Christians could not do so in good conscience. As a substitute for the phrase, "Caesar is lord," the early Christians made their affirmation by saying, "Jesus is Lord." To do that was to provoke the wrath of the Roman government, and in many cases, it cost the Christian his life."

The emperor was not only the political leader of the Roman Empire, he was also the religious leader. The emperor was known as the PONTIFEX MAXIMUS which means that he was the CHIEF PRIEST (the head priest, the number one priest). His position became so elevated that he even became an object of divine worship.

Paul was going around teaching everyone that "Jesus is Lord;" a direct affront to Caesar. If Rome was to execute Paul, they would most surely consider executing those who were supporting him.

Epaphroditus trusted the Lord with his life and traveled to Rome to be counted among those who loved, served and obeyed the Lord Jesus Christ even if it meant offering his life in death.

So it certainly wasn't a "lack of faith" that caused Epaphroditus to get sick. We don't know how and why he got sick; we just know that he did and almost died.

Paul writes in verse 27, "*For indeed he was sick almost unto death; but God had mercy on him, and not only on him but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow.*"

I can tell you that I know personally how it feels to lose someone like an Epaphroditus. One of the first of two deacons I had the privilege of laying the hands of ordination on was a brother named Stanley Leazer.

Deacon Stanley was a faithful husband, father and a very close friend; he was a dedicated brother in the Lord. He faithfully served the Lord's people and his pastor.

Within a couple of years after he was ordained he was diagnosed with liver cancer. Stan's last words to me right before he died were, "Don't be anxious."

We had four deacons at the time and when Stanley died, so did the stability of our deacon board. Unlike Paul, I *did* have sorrow upon sorrow.

But God saved Epaphroditus and so Paul writes in verse 28, "*Therefore I sent him the more eagerly, that when you see him again you may rejoice, and I may be less sorrowful.*"

The Philippian believer had heard that Epaphroditus was sick and near to death. News in those days could take months to get from one place to the other. Paul was sorrowful because the Philippian church was sorrowful because they hadn't received the news of Epaphroditus' recovery.

Let me tell you something...with all the evidences that there was some striving going on between the members of the church at Philippi; this was a church that loved Paul and a church that Paul loved.

Paul started this church—Acts 16 tells us of the charter members—Lydia and her group of women who were praying—the young slave girl who was demon possessed and was used to make money by telling fortunes; the jailor who almost killed himself when the earthquake shook the prison doors loose where Paul and Silas were locked up.

This church has obviously grown in numbers by now and Paul tells them in verse 29-30 to "*Receive him (Epaphroditus) therefore in the Lord with all gladness, and hold such men in esteem; because for the work of Christ he came close to death, not regarding his life, to supply what was lacking in your service toward me.*"

The Philippian church could not all get to Paul—but Epaphroditus was able to supply to Paul what the Philippian church wanted to—it wasn't just the financial support they wanted to send; they also desired to send their *love* and did so in the person of Epaphroditus.

When I was growing up the older folks used to talk about how they would "*work their fingers to the bone.*" Much of what Black folks did post slavery was menial labor—working with their hands—washing and cleaning things, repairing things—running machinery.

Another expression I heard used was, "*working myself to death.*" Epaphroditus *literally* almost worked himself to death and was commemorated in Scripture by the Holy Spirit for all to read.

The key to Epaphroditus' commitment according to Paul is found in verse 30: "*he did not regard his life.*" Epaphroditus' illness was directly connected with his inexhaustible service for Jesus Christ.

We are living in the day where it's almost a sin to work yourself to death—even for the Lord. People step down from ministry because they are tired. I've heard people say that they stopped serving because "I've been doing it for a long time and it's time to bring some new blood in."

More often than not, I've seen these people not only leave their ministry post, they quit serving the Lord altogether.

My question is, "If God has called someone to that ministry assignment...shouldn't it be the Lord who tells him or her when they've completed it?"

At the end of a very controversial career in the military, General Douglas MacArthur addresses Congress on April 19, 1951. He ends his speech with these words,

I am closing my 52 years of military service. When I joined the Army, even before the turn of the century, it was the fulfillment of all of my boyish hopes and dreams. The world has turned over many times since I took the oath at West Point, and the hopes and dreams have all since vanished, but I still remember the refrain of one of the most popular barracks ballads of that day which proclaimed most proudly that old soldiers never die; they just fade away. And like the old soldier of that ballad, I now close my military career and just fade away, an old soldier who tried to do his duty as God gave him the light to see that duty.

Good Bye.

Someone has said, “It is better to burn out for Christ than to rust out.” It is better to die in the service of Jesus than to be counted a mere statistic among those who die from illness or accident.

The only thing that could stop Paul from serving the Lord was death and when that time drew near Paul would write in 2 Timothy chapter four:

2 Tim 4:6 For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand.

2 Tim 4:7 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.

2 Tim 4:8 Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.

I trust that this sermon has caused you to consider where you are in light of your calling and service to the Lord. What are your priorities when it comes to the discharge of your Christian duty to Christ and His body.

Are you being mentored? Are you mentoring someone in the things of Christ? Are you someone’s Paul or someone’s Timothy?

Are you raising your children up to do ministry? Only what’s done for Christ will last.