



Transcendent Joy: Learning How to Rejoice No Matter What

Message #13: **Lessons from a Spiritual Risk-taker** (Philippians 2:25-30) – February 26, 2023 - Pastor Jeff

- Life is full of risk and we all generally look for ways to mitigate that risk in order to avoid unnecessary suffering. One of those elevated risks is living for the Lord Jesus Christ and serving His church. We “*walk by faith and not by sight*” (2 Cor. 5:7), worship an unconventional God we have never seen, generally live out of step with the beliefs and values of this world, and endure the sneers, slanders, and sufferings of people who think we are utter fools that need to be ignored and even silenced.
- Paul introduces us to another one of his gospel associates, Epaphroditus who reflects the life of a spiritual risk-taker. He is willing to go, give and even gamble his life away for one reason – the Lord Jesus Christ.
- We virtually know nothing about Epaphroditus except what we find in this section of Scripture. He appears to be an ordinary guy with a Greek background (due to his name) and he delivered the special offering the Philippians had generously given to meet the needs of Paul’s life and ministry (4:18).
- There are three lessons we can learn from the words Paul shares about Epaphroditus that teach us about being a spiritual risk-taker.

❶ Be a bold partner in ministry (2:25)

- Paul viewed Epaphroditus as a “*necessary*” or indispensable representative to be sent to minister to the Philippian church. We learn five reasons why he was so essential in this ministry circumstance.
 - 1) In the family of God, Paul recognized him as “*my brother*”. Paul was sending a personal and forever member of the same family on his behalf.
 - 2) In the fellowship of the saints, Paul recognized him as a “*fellow worker*”. Paul was sending someone who served the gospel ministry well like Paul and Timothy did (1 Thess. 3:2)
 - 3) In the fight for God’s grace and truth, Paul recognized him as a “*fellow soldier*”. He knew the ministry was a fight that occurred in hostile territory, demanded alertness to the schemes of the devil and required a ready and willing heart to “*suffer hardship*” as “*a good soldier of Jesus Christ*” (2 Tim. 2:3-4)
 - 4) In the field of church ministry, Paul recognized him as an effective “*messenger*” from the Philippian church. He was an apostle (“*messenger*”) of the church sent out on a specific mission.
 - 5) In the function of ministry. Paul recognized him as a “*minister*” to his needs. He was like a priest (the functional meaning of the word “*minister*”) who carried out a sacred duty in ministering to Paul.

❷ Be a burdened participant in ministry (2:26-27, 30)

- Epaphroditus’ burden was such that it led him to come “close to death...risking his life” in his ministry. He was willing to sacrifice his life if necessary for the sake of Christ.

- o He had an unselfish burden (v. 26-27, 30) driven by a *“longing”* for his church family (v. 26). This longing drove him to serve beyond his own limitations, whether physical, mental or emotional (v. 26: He was *“sick”*; v. 27: He was *“sick to the point of death”*; v. 30: He *“came close to death”*). The Lord *“had mercy”* on him and Paul so that Paul wouldn’t have *“sorrow upon sorrow”* (v. 27)
- o He had an unusual burden (v. 26b-2a: *“was distressed”*). This distress was a mental and spiritual anguish that could move a person to the point of losing one’s own composure. Paul felt bad that Epaphroditus felt bad because the Philippians felt bad). This word of *“distress”* is the same word used of Jesus when He was feeling the heavy weight of sacrificing His own innocent life on the cross for guilty sinners (Mark 14:33).
- o He had an undeterred burden (v. 30: *“risking his life to complete what was deficient in your service to me”*). The *“work of Christ”* kept Epaphroditus rolling the dice (the meaning of the word *“risking”*) with his health and other potential vulnerabilities. He was focused on getting the right job done (*“completing what was deficient”*). Ministry was more important than his own circumstances and people were more important than his personal agenda.

③ Be a beneficial presence in ministry (2:28-29)

- Epaphroditus was truly an asset to Paul and his church family in Philippi.
 - o His presence generated the benefit of rejoicing (v. 28: *“in order that when you see him again you may rejoice”*). Epaphroditus caused people to be joyful which also rejoiced Paul’s heart who became *“less concerned about”* the Philippians.
 - o His presence generated the benefit of respect (v. 29). Paul told the church to *“receive him then in the Lord with all joy”* because He had given his all to serve the Lord, Paul and his church family. He should be held *“in high regard”* because he served sacrificially to seek God’s best for God’s people.