



Central Peninsula Church

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Philippians 2:19-30
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Heroes

SERIES: Philippians: A People and A Place Transformed by the Gospel

How many of you here are daydreamers? I'm a daydreamer. I always have been. During my adolescent years I had this one daydream that I always came back to. Several times a week I played this daydream in my mind. I think it began in the 4th or 5th grade and carried on through my high school years. In fact, once in a while I still find myself dreaming this daydream.

From kindergarten through my senior year of high school, I attended the same private Christian school. And twice a week we attended chapel services in our school's auditorium. This auditorium was huge. It was about five times the size of this room. You could fit about 3,000 people in the room. Most of us would sit on the long, gray pews on the first level, then another 1,000 or so people could sit up in the balcony that wrapped around the back and sides of the auditorium. The ceiling was about 100 feet tall, and several catwalks crisscrossed above the bright lights that hung from the ceiling. The stage was also huge, several times the size of this stage. A couple of hundred choir members could fit on the stage. Behind the stage and throughout the whole auditorium were many doors that lead to different rooms—the choir room, classrooms, other mysterious rooms. One of the doorways led you up a set of narrow stairs, through another doorway, and out onto one of the two large baptisimals that stood about 20 feet off the ground on each side of the stage, right about where each of our screens sit.

For over a decade of my life I attended weekly chapel services in that auditorium. Most every week, generally right when the preacher got up to talk, my daydreaming began. And the daydream was always that terrorists had stormed into the room and taken over our chapel service. I'd look around that huge room and I'd envision 10 or so bad guys, dressed in black and carrying big black guns, some would rappel down from the ceiling and some would explode in from the balcony or one of the many doorways and hold us all hostage. That part of the daydream was always the same. What was always different was how I saved the day. I was always the hero of my own daydream.

Sometimes it was through a direct assault, sometimes through playing dead, sometimes through sneaking through the ventilation ducts below the pews—there were hundreds of variations on how I saved

the day, on how I took out the terrorists, rescued the preacher and my teachers, and won the admiration of all my buddies and any girl that I may have had a crush on at the time. All of this went on in my head while listening to a sermon.

Now, why is that? Why did I always daydream about being a hero? Part of it was surely due to my pride and overly large estimate of my abilities—as a ten-year-old I really did believe that if I had to, I could single handedly rescue my school from machine guns and terrorists. That's part of it, but much of my daydream was due—is due—to the fact that our culture is hero-centered.

Think about this. One of the most popular TV shows in America, *24*, is a show that's built around a hero figure, Jack Bauer, who fights crisis after crisis and saves the day. The most watched new TV show of this last year is built around several hero figures. What show am I talking about? *Heroes*. The title says it all. The highest grossing movie from this last week, *Live Free or Die Hard*, centers on one heroic character, John McClane, who rescues America from an attack by terrorists. Right now, the top two books on the New York Times Best Sellers list are books about two people who millions view as heroes: Ronald Reagan and Princess Diana. And remember the Virginia Tech shootings from a few months ago? After that tragic event the news flooded our homes with stories of heroes. We heard about the 76-year-old engineering professor, a holocaust survivor, who blocked the door to his classroom, placing himself in between the shooter and his students, and had his body riddled with bullets in order to save a few lives. And we heard about the heroic French teacher who told her students to get on the floor while she also placed her body against the door to her classroom, and lost her life while saving lives.

This hero centeredness is not unique to 21st century American culture. If you look at ancient literature from around the world or if you take any decisive moment in world history, you'll find a story about a hero. We have been and always will be a people who are hero-oriented in our thinking.

There are two qualities that are always true of a hero. First, a hero helps people. Second, a hero serves as an object of emulation. In some way, people want to emulate, imitate, be like, this or that hero. Heroes can

change us. The people that we esteem as heroes have the potential to influence and shape us in significant ways. That's why it's so important that we choose our heroes wisely. As my father-in-law said to me this last week, we're a generation that has made non-heroes out to be heroes. We've become a people who emulate the wrong kind of people.

So, let me ask you, who are your heroes? Who are the people you look up to that you want to emulate? Have you let the word of God define your idea of what a hero is?

We're in our 9th sermon on the book of Philippians, the apostle Paul's ancient letter to a community of Christians living in the city of Philippi. Most recently in this letter, a few months back, we saw the rich theology of chapter 2 as Paul spoke about the humble movement of Christ, who moved from heaven to earth, died on a cross, and moved back to his throne in heaven, all to save us from sin and death. We had a theological feast as we digested Paul's call to live as citizens of the gospel and to work out our salvation with fear and trembling, all because God himself is at work in us. And after such a feast, today's passage appears rather light, rather insubstantial. Today's passage, Philippians 2:19-30, is actually the most neglected and overlooked passage in Philippians. Most of us skip right over it. The famous theologian, Karl Barth, once said that this passage "does not contain any direct teaching."

Karl Barth was wrong. Because with today's passage Paul shifts gears in his letter not merely to give us his travel plans, not merely to share a fine detail or two about a man named Timothy and a man named Epaphroditus, but to present the Philippian church and to present us with a portrait of two heroes. Paul devotes a full 10% of this letter to talking about Timothy and Epaphroditus because these two men embody exactly what Paul's been talking about in this letter. These two men are the living letter to the Philippians.

We've seen that the Philippian church had the beginnings of conflict, division, and pride creeping into their community. And Paul knows that if these people are going to change, if the church is going to heal and mature, they need more than a letter, more than a sermon, more than a slice of Bible. They need real people, role models, heroes who are living the letter, living the sermon, living the Bible, who can serve as flesh and blood objects of emulation for the Philippian people.

There's a degree of change and transformation that will not happen in our lives until we have contact with real people who embody what our Bible and what our sermons are talking about. Trying to grow in the Christian life without access to godly heroes who you

can emulate is like trying to draw a straight line without a ruler—your line just isn't going to come out as straight and steady as it could if you had access to someone else's seasoned ruler and could trace your line along it. But how do you get your hands on such a ruler? According to the Bible, what exactly are you to look for in a hero? Today's passage gives us the answer.

"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. 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. 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" (Philippians 2:19–30).

I. Emulate People like Timothy.

Twenty-eight times in the New Testament we come across the command to "imitate" or "emulate" another person, to trace our lives off of another as a vital means of growing in Christ. This command does not appear in our passage, but a similar and perhaps stronger command appears here. Verse 29 actually gives us two commands. Speaking of Epaphroditus the church is told to "receive" him and speaking of both Timothy and Epaphroditus the church is commanded to "honor" such men. Evidently, there's a certain type of person that is to be received and honored, to be esteemed and emulated, by the church. Certain qualities are prerequisite. Our culture is quick to recognize hero figures on the basis of one's wealth, looks, skill, or power. This text calls us to be a counterculture—to detect, honor, and emulate a very different kind of hero.

Timothy is such a man. Paul, remember, is writing from prison in Rome and here he lets the church in Philippi know that he hopes to visit them soon, but before that can happen he's sending Timothy and Epaphroditus to Philippi to help the church. Epaphroditus will go first and then Timothy will follow. Even though Timothy will be the second of the two men to travel to Philippi, Paul tells us about Timothy first. So, we'll look at Timothy first, then Epaphroditus.

So, who was Timothy? Well, we know that Timothy was a young man. At the time this letter was written he was probably in his twenties—he would've met the age requirement for being in our twenties group! We also know that Timothy was a pastor. In our Bibles, the letters 1st and 2nd Timothy, letters about how to pastor and plant churches, were written to this same Timothy. Young pastor Timothy was a close associate of Paul's. His name is included as a co-author in six of Paul's letters, including this letter. Here in verse 20 Paul says of Timothy that he has "no one like him," or as other translations have it, in Timothy Paul has "a kindred spirit."

Another important fact about Timothy is that unlike Epaphroditus, Timothy was not from Philippi. He didn't live there. Timothy was a pastor on a different continent in the city of Ephesus back in Asia, and for the time being he was on a sabbatical of sorts, assisting Paul and assisting the Philippian church, which he had visited a time or two before. And here, in just five short verses, Paul paints us a heroic portrait of Timothy, giving us three directives as to the kind of people we ought to be emulating as Christians, the kind of people we ought to honor as heroes.

First, we are to emulate people who are genuinely concerned for the welfare of others, like Timothy was. In verse 20 Paul says of Timothy, "I have no one like him, who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare." Timothy is a living illustration of what Paul's been talking about here in chapter 2. Look at what Paul called the church to do back in verses 3 and 4: "In humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others." Timothy's character is defined by these verses. The Philippian church is presently defined by a lack of these virtues, a lack of humility and genuine concern for others, so the presence of a guy like Timothy in that congregation would've had the profound effect of directing everyone's attention to a radically different way of doing relationships. Paul is giving Timothy his stamp of approval; he's saying to the church, "Timothy is the real deal, he's already applied what I've been talking about in this letter, so keep your eyes on Timothy, emulate him, let him change you."

We live in a culture where Timothys are

overlooked. Instead of emulating people like Timothy we emulate pop culture icons who are genuinely concerned not for the welfare of others, but for the welfare of themselves. You need to spend only five minutes with the average person in my generation, or only three minutes with your average high school or middle school student—listening to their music, looking at their clothes, listening to their speech, and inquiring about their dreams—to discover that we've cast non-heroes as heroes. We emulate celebrities who chase fame, rather than Timothys who chase the well being of others. This breaks my heart. We have an emerging generation that believes the lie that the good life is found in being like Brad or Angelina, Oprah or Paris, rather than in being like Timothy.

This grieves me, but it makes me glad to know that God has given our church a whole bunch of Timothys. Our body is full of people who lay aside their own interests and show genuine concern for the welfare of others. I immediately think of people like Steve Toler and Louise Lagarrigue, just two of many people here whose genuine concern for others we ought to emulate. Our church is a far healthier place because of the presence of heroes like Steve, who's driving our high school group down to San Diego this weekend, and Louise, who got here early this morning to unlock doors and make sure this service could happen. If you're someone who's grown stagnant in your faith and listening to this sermon isn't helping much, I just about guarantee that if you were to ask Steve or Louise out to coffee and discover the genuine concern they have for others, you'd rearrange your idea of a hero and you'd get going again in your walk with Christ.

Next, Timothy's life shows us that we are to emulate people of proven worth. In verse 22 Paul draws attention to what he calls Timothy's "proven worth." Many of us tend to quickly latch onto the newest fad or personality and let that drive us until the next big thing comes around. Perhaps some of that was going on in Philippi. Many suggest that the problems going on in Philippi stemmed from the presence of a big, new, unproven personality or two who came roaring into the church, capturing people's attention, and leading many into error. The Philippian church needed a Timothy, a leader of proven worth.

It takes time to become such a leader. Timothy didn't become a godly hero overnight. Paul goes on in verse 22 to tell of how Timothy has served with Paul "as a son with a father." In the ancient world, people learned by apprenticeship. If

your father was a farmer, a son learned how to farm by spending years apprenticing under his father, watching his father work with soil, asking his father questions about the best time of year to plant wheat, receiving constant coaching from his father on how to push a plow, harvest grain, or protect the crop from rodents. Timothy spent years apprenticing under Paul in the gospel. He'd proved his worth.

Are your heroes people of proven worth? Oddly, we live in a culture that believes new is better than old. Next is better than before. The new and the next come around and we forget the proven worth of what came before. We do well to recognize that God has filled our church with people who have spent years apprenticing as Christians and who, therefore, are worthy of our emulation. There are many of you here who are double my age, who are of proven worth, and who I seek to emulate. But since we're talking about Timothy here and since Timothy was in his twenties, let me highlight two twentysomethings from our body who have proved worthy of emulation. Colin Dobrin and Danielle Steed have spent years apprenticing in the Christian faith. They faithfully serve on the leadership team in our twenties ministry, and they fill this church with such health because of their proven track record. If we're wise, we'll be a church who emulates people like Colin and Danielle. They are two of my CPC heroes.

Thirdly, Timothy's life teaches us to emulate people who are gospel-driven. Timothy's apprenticeship under Paul was not in farming, or religion, or conservative values, but as verse 22 says, it was "in the gospel." The gospel is what Paul keeps talking about in this letter. The more I study Philippians the more I think the central verse of this whole book is 1:27, the call to live as citizens of the gospel, to be a people radically driven by the good news that Jesus has suffered to atone for our sins, renew the world, and bring us to God. That's the best news in the world, that when the almighty God looks at a filthy sinner like me, because of what happened on a cross 2,000 years ago, God now looks at me through his Son. And just as when you hold up a pair of red lenses to your eyes you see only red, or a pair of green lenses to your eyes and you see only green, when God the Father looks at a sinner like me through Jesus, he sees only his child, a man who's been washed clean and forgiven.

I need to hear this gospel every single day of my Christian life. I want the gospel and the gospel alone to drive my life as a man, husband, father, pastor, and friend, just like it drove Timothy's life. Timothy spent over a decade of his life apprenticing under Paul in the gospel—watching him relate to God, listening to him pray, observing how he did relationships and loved people, watching Paul handle failure, seeing his habit of repentance, being constantly coached by Paul in the

wonders of the gospel and its radical implications for every inch of our lives. Timothy is such a great guy because he's a man who's been overcome by the gospel. I am forever on the lookout for heroes who I can emulate in this regard. Because, friends, some of us have had mentors who are more religion-driven, who have directed us towards trying to be good for God and the crushing practice of trying to earn God's acceptance, rather than directing us towards the good news that God has accepted us through crushing his Son on the cross, in our place.

Above all, Timothy is to be emulated because he's a gospel-driven man. Praise God that he's filled our church with such people. I wish I could point out many of you, but I love that this sermon at least gives me the chance to point out some of the heroes here who we ought to emulate. Again from the twenties group, the group of people in our body who I get to spend the most time with and who I love dearly, my wife and I regularly look, as individuals and as a couple, to Dan and Shannon Maass and their gospel-driven lives. Dan and Shannon get it, they get the gospel. They are a gift to our church and to our Peninsula. If you don't know Dan and Shannon, you should get to know them.

It takes the gospel to get a hold of our broken lives and transform us and keep transforming us into people who are worthy of emulation. When Paul first met Timothy as a teenager, Timothy was not the hero who's mentioned in these pages. We know that Timothy had a Christian mother, but a non-Christian father, and it presumably took years for Timothy to work out what it meant to be a Christian man under the tutelage of Paul. And heroic Timothy was far from perfect. Other parts of the Bible speak to his tendency to fear people and to timidly shrink back from God's call on his life. The same is true of Epaphroditus.

II. Emulate People like Epaphroditus.

Epaphroditus shows up only in the book of Philippians. Unlike Timothy, he was not a pastor, but simply a faithful member of the church in Philippi. It's probable that Paul met Epaphroditus when he first planted the church in Philippi, ten years before writing this letter. And though Epaphroditus appears as a heroic Christian in these next six verses, he didn't start out this way. Most all scholars believe that Epaphroditus came from a thoroughly pagan, non-Christian family because of his name. And I really think this is rather cruel of his parents. The name Epaphroditus comes from the name Aphrodite—the female Greek goddess of sex. Now, that's not a good start for getting six verses of the Bible devoted to your

name, to be a man named after a sex goddess. So, even though I'm going to point out some good stuff about this guy, never name your son Epaphroditus!

From Epaphroditus we see two more directives as to the kind of people we ought to emulate. First, Epaphroditus teaches us to emulate people who are team players. Look at how Paul describes Epaphroditus with five adjectives in verse 25. All of these descriptions testify to the team-playerness of Epaphroditus. We're accustomed to honoring as heroes lone ranger figures who do it all on their own. We want to be like the "Marlboro Man" who heads off with his horse into the rugged wilderness, to do something heroic by himself and earn his own spot on a billboard back home. The Bible wants us to recognize a different type of hero.

The first description Paul gives Epaphroditus is "brother." For Christians the term "brother" or "sister" is the key term that identifies us as being part of a family, God's family. There is no such thing as an "only child" in the church. Paul recognizes Epaphroditus as an integral part of the family of God.

Next, Epaphroditus is called a "fellow worker." Throughout this letter Paul's been calling the church to work together and put aside their petty divisions. When Epaphroditus first carried this letter back to Philippi, the whole church would've gathered together while someone read this letter out loud. And as this portion of the letter was read, everybody would've turned their head towards Epaphroditus as Paul commended him as the type of worker the church ought to emulate. Epaphroditus didn't give himself these designations, someone else, Paul, observed these qualities in him and pointed them out publicly. That's why I've been doing the same with some of you this morning. I'm just being biblical.

Next, Paul calls Epaphroditus a "fellow soldier." What made the Roman soldiers of Paul's day so successful was that they fought as a team. Roman soldiers fought side by side in battle, protecting one another with their overlapping shields and sword thrusts. Epaphroditus is such a soldier in the gospel, having traveled all this way out of concern for Paul and a concern to protect his church back in Philippi.

This leads into the next description, "messenger." Epaphroditus was a messenger both from the Philippians to Paul and from Paul to the Philippians. He served as a bridge between two distant cities. When the Philippians finally caught wind that Paul was imprisoned in Rome, Epaphroditus volunteered himself to travel the 800 miles to Rome to bring relief to Paul and to report on the problems going on in Philippi. This would've been a dangerous two month journey by road, or an even more dangerous several week journey by sea. After making this

journey and after spending time with prisoner Paul, Epaphroditus traveled all the way back to Philippi with this letter. We now have millions of copies of Philippians, but long ago, this man tucked the only copy of Philippians into his coat and for 800 miles he protected this letter so that his church and, now, so that our church could benefit from it. What a messenger. What a team player.

The final description Paul gives Epaphroditus is "minister." Though Epaphroditus was not a pastor like Timothy, he was still a minister. Epaphroditus was consumed with a desire to minister to his friend Paul and to minister to his church. Do you know that even though you may not be an elder or pastor in this church, if you're a Christian and you belong to this church, you're one of the ministers here? Paul wants the church in Philippi, and I want us, to emulate people who have this truth burned into their character, who know that their life is to be spent ministering to others. Epaphroditus had a day job. Maybe he was a potter, or a baker, or a blacksmith, yet he was still recognized as a minister to God's people. No matter whatever else he had going on, Epaphroditus was a ministering team player in the church.

I think most of us know that we have heroes like this in our church. I think of Brett Smith and Linda Poleselli, two people who have busy non-church jobs, yet their hearts beat for this church. Whether it's in leading worship or in helping lead last week's VBS, Brett and Linda minister to us as team players. Emulating Brett and Linda would bring about needed change in many of our lives, including my own.

Now Paul makes a final point about Epaphroditus. It's the call to emulate people who take risks for Christ. In verse 30 Paul says that Epaphroditus "nearly died for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete what was lacking in your service to me." This is the only place this word "risking" appears in the New Testament. It's a gambling term. Epaphroditus risked, he gambled, his life for the work of Christ. Paul's talking about Epaphroditus' illness here. Somewhere along the way, during his dangerous journey to Rome or maybe after he arrived in Rome, Epaphroditus fell ill. We don't know what his illness was, just that it was so bad it almost killed him. He nearly died. He risked his life for Christ. He's a hero. He should be emulated because he embodies everything Paul's been talking about in this letter—to live is Christ, and to die is gain.

Most of us here won't be called to risk our lives for Christ, but we're all called to risk our comfort,

our money, our reputation, our plans, and perhaps some of our dreams for Christ. If we were to boil Timothy's three heroic qualities and Epaphroditus' two heroic qualities down to just one phrase it would be this: these men were Christ-like. The point of our passage today is that in a culture of non-heroes, we need to honor and emulate Christ-like heroes. Christians need Christ-like heroes. And so does our whole culture, so does the whole Peninsula.

There's a degree of change and transformation that cannot happen in our lives, in our church, or on this peninsula until we can detect, honor, and emulate Christ-like heroes. The way to do this is simple, three steps: be on the look out here for Christ-like people, get to know them, and begin to emulate them.

This is the process I'm already beginning with my son. My son is only eight months old, but I know that in just a few years he's going to start detecting his heroes, he's going start locking his eyes onto certain types of people that he wants to emulate. What I want to teach my son is that his heroes aren't out there, his heroes are not to be the Christ-less non-heroes that our culture holds up. I want to teach him that his heroes are in here. I want to teach him to make Christ-like men his heroes in life, men who, like Timothy, show genuine concern for others, have proven their worth, and live gospel-driven lives. I want my son to emulate men like Epaphroditus who are team players and take courageous risks for Christ.

I already direct my son to such men at CPC. Every Sunday and all week long I'm trying to put my son into contact with such men so that as he gets older it will be even more natural for me to point out such men and whisper in his ear, "Cru, I want you to grow up to be like him. He's Christ-like, keep your eyes on him, emulate him. He's a hero of mine and I want him to be your hero too." I pray that as the years go by God will fill our church with more and more men of this stature. And, I hope to have a daughter someday, so I pray God will also fill our church with more and more heroic women of this stature.

III. Conclusion: The Ultimate Hero.

This sermon would be incomplete if I left you with the weight of emulating and becoming Christ-like heroes and I didn't close by telling you about our ultimate hero. Every sermon should have this man as its hero because he's the hero of the whole Bible.

It's a great privilege that we can emulate men like Timothy and Epaphroditus and men and women who are similarly Christ-like here at CPC. But it's an even greater privilege that we can fix our attention on the greatest hero of all. We are called to emulate this hero, but this hero did something that none of us could ever do, that none of us could ever emulate and in response to this, in response to him, all we can do is say "thank you."

Jesus Christ is our ultimate hero. In verse 20 Paul said he had no one like Timothy, and yet Paul still humbly sent him away for the sake of the church. But it's far more significant that God the Father, who had no one like his only Son Jesus, sent Jesus away to us in order to save us from our sins.

And Epaphroditus. Epaphroditus risked his life; he nearly died for the sake of the gospel. But Jesus didn't merely risk his life, he lost his life, he did die, not for the sake of the gospel, but to give us the gospel.

And you know what? Here's the best thing I'm going to say today, Jesus didn't die for heroes. He died for villains. He died for sinners. He died for broken, un-heroic people. Before any of us here ever did anything worth emulating, Jesus loved us on the cross.