

# Philippians 2.19–30

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## *Caring for one another*

Amington St Editha

Sunday 4 September 2016

Finding Joy in the Journey (5)

### **A hard act to follow**

I'm sure you've all heard the phrase, 'a hard act to follow'. Or you've watched a really bad sequel to one of your favourite films. I think for me the prize for most disappointing sequel(s) goes to the Matrix Revolutions. I was so disappointed with it that I actually made it all the way to angry!

But probably the hardest act to follow, is Jesus.

In the last couple of weeks we have seen and heard just how high he set the bar – and listened to Paul telling us to **have the same mindset** as Jesus (2.5), to **do nothing out of selfish ambition** (2.3), and **everything without grumbling or arguing** (2.14). We saw Jesus' perfect example of obedience (2.8), and were challenged by Paul to **work out** our **salvation**, as **God works in** us (2.12-13).

Frankly, it sounds like an impossible task.

And in a sense it is. This side of heaven, we will always fall short, we will keep struggling with our sinful desires – but that doesn't mean we should stop trying.

When we looked at the beginning of Philippians, I quoted v6:

he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

*Philippians 1.6 (NIV)*

That verse encourages me that *God isn't done with me yet*. I'm a work in progress – and so are you. I'm not the finished article – God is and will continue to work in me.

And the thing is, at least a work in progress is *in progress*. We are on a journey of faith, a journey of discipleship, a of following Jesus. Some days we do better than others – but we need to keep trying.

That's why, immediately after giving the perfect example of Jesus, Paul offers us three more examples. They aren't perfect, but they do show us that following Jesus, working out our salvation is still work the effort, because God is at work in us (2.12-13).

## ‘in the Lord’

The first example, is Paul himself. Look in verse 19 and in verse 24 – do you notice the repeated phrase **in the Lord**? Paul’s **hope** and his **confidence** are in: Jesus. He knows that he (Paul) is not in charge, but he (Jesus) is. On the face of things, Paul was under the control of the Imperial Guard, in jail, awaiting trial. But he knew who was *really* in charge: Jesus.

It is sometimes said that when we are put under pressure, we find out who we really are, what is really important to us. Notice that Paul didn’t rant and rave at God – ‘how could you let me be put in prison like this?’ – but was full of faith and obedience, looking for opportunities to serve God, whatever his circumstances.

## ‘served with me’

And that’s the next thing: look in verse 22: **Timothy... has served with me in the work of the gospel**. They know who’s in charge – and they *actively* serve him. It’s hard work, they put effort in.

And, it’s not easy. Epaphroditus also served – he carried a message to Paul from the Philippians, and **risked his life** (30). He served Paul on behalf of his church, and became so ill he **almost died** (27).

There is a cost when we offer ourselves to God in service. I think that is why sometimes Christians can slip into the habit of giving God an hour and a half of time every week, on a Sunday. Sometimes Christians can get into the habit of being passive, always sitting and receiving, without ever really offering to serve Jesus or their church family themselves.

If you feel yourself slipping into those bad habits, the cure is to find a way to serve your Christian brothers and sisters in the St Editha's church family. Churches *always* have gaps in rotas – and if you aren't able to help with any of those, believe me I can find you something to do that is really useful to the life of the church!

We all need to ask ourselves: how can I obey Jesus? And a big part of the answer, for all of us, includes the word 'serve'.

## **'genuine concern'**

Another big part is how we treat one another. As we read through Philippians ~~I hope that some of you have been doing your homework and have read through the whole letter at home?~~

If you haven't, please can I encourage you to take some time this week to do that. I suspect it will bring back some of the things I've said, and highlight some of the things I haven't!

Anyway... as we read through Philippians together, I hope you are getting a sense for how much Paul loved them. But it wasn't simply Paul who felt like that.

Look at verse 20 with me:

I have no one else like [Timothy], who will show genuine concern for your welfare. For everyone looks out for their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ.

*Philippians 2.20-21 (NIV)*

For a while during my curacy I was worried. I knew that we are all called to love one another, deeply – but I didn't feel it. I had a sort of surface concern for the members of our churches, but it didn't really go much deeper than that. If I were brutally honest with myself, I didn't *really* care in any deep sense.

And I beat myself up about it. I thought there was something wrong with me, something missing. I would read verses like this, and think, 'Where is my **genuine concern**?'

But, as my curacy wore on, I realised that my love for them was growing. I realised I was starting to feel **genuine concern for [their] welfare** (20). The more I spent time with them, the more I got to know them, the more I cared, the more I *loved*.

Friends, love is not only something we *have*, it is something we *do*. We are praying daily for our **love to abound more and more** (1.9). Well here's the punchline: that means we have to *do* love.

*How* do we love others? By putting *their* needs and interests before our own. How do we do that? Well, the first step is getting to know each other, to find out what each other's needs and interests actually *are* – otherwise, we can't put them first!

## **'co-worker and fellow soldier'**

Obedience means acknowledging Jesus is in charge, and serving him. Obedience means learning to love and serve one another.

And, obedience means working *together*.

It's so easy for us to exist side-by-side, without ever truly working together. But Paul says Timothy **has served with me** (22), and describes Ephaphroditus as **my brother, co-worker and fellow soldier** (25).

To work together we must make the effort to be **of one mind** (2), to let the unity that is ours in Christ bubble up to the surface, so we are journeying together, not simply side-by-side.

At one time in their lives, that would have been impossible for Paul and Epaphroditus. Paul was a Pharisee, a strict Jew who would have nothing to do with Gentiles. He would not even have eaten dinner with a Gentile, let alone worked alongside one.

But in Christ, he and Epaphroditus were united – and they worked hard to let that unity bubble up to the surface, so that they worked and fought together. ‘Be what you are,’ Paul says.

Churches can be full of divisions, both small and large. But we don’t have a choice: we must work through them. And, it’s not a case of insisting that *we* are correct, and others have to join *us*. Jesus did not make the Jews into Gentiles or the Gentiles into Jews – rather, he created *one new kingdom* for them both to live in.

I think this is one of the hardest things to do in a church – to be united without forcing one group to join another, to find a way of working *together* as one family.

But it is possible.

Paul, Timothy and Epaphroditus showed in their own lives that it *is* possible to follow Jesus’ example – however imperfectly, we still need to try. So next week we will look at *striving towards heaven*.

## Activity

You should all have a piece of paper with two headings on. The first is ‘What **one thing** might I do that will help me abound in love for my church family?’

In that section you might write about calling someone you’ve been meaning to call, or offering to help fill a gap on a rota, or make an effort to find out what people need you to pray for – *and then praying for them.*

The second heading is ‘What **one thing** might we do as a church family that will help us abound in love for each other?’

Notice the question is ‘we’ – you are only allowed to put something down there if you would be willing to be part of. If you find yourself putting down something you think *other people* should do, please cross it out and start again! Whatever you write should be something *we* can do, *together*, that *you* are willing to be part of.

And remember, this isn’t a list – this is *one thing* – and, if you are listening to the recording, please find a piece of paper and do the activity with us.



§ The two questions are:

1. What **one thing** might *I* do that will help me abound in love for my church family?
2. What **one thing** might *we* do as a church family that will help us abound in love for each other?

After a few minutes, I'm going to collect them up, – and take them home, read them and pray through them. This is our opportunity to think about how we might abound in love, and grow genuine concern for each other. There is **great joy** (29) to be had in learning to love and care for each other like this. Such love comes through God's grace at work in us, *and* through our own effort.

*Allow about five minutes for this*

*Ask everyone to fold and then tear the paper in half, to keep the top half to try and do this week, and hand in the bottom half to me.*