

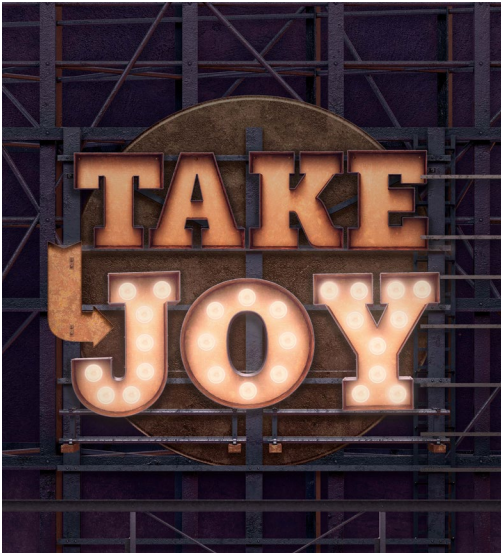


# Sermon Growth Guide

**February 5, 2023**

**Joy with Friends**





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**Take Joy - Joy with Friends**

**Philippians 2:19-3:3**

**Key Verse:** Philippians 2:29 “So then, welcome him in the Lord with great joy and honor people like him,”

**Big Idea:** Friendships of Christian love help us find joy, no matter what circumstances surround us.

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## Foundations

This is week four of our sermon series titled **Take Joy**.

Proverbs 27:9 says, “A sweet friendship replenishes the soul and awakens the heart for joy.”

Friendships are gifts from God. And friendships give joy! In chapter 2 of Philippians, the Apostle Paul holds up two exemplary men who are dear friends to him.

Although Paul is under house arrest in Rome, both Timothy and Epaphroditus provide care and support through their physical presence and partnership in the gospel.

This week, we consider our important friendships—those people who have been God’s sources of joy to us in our lonely spaces. We also think about what kind of friends we are called to be others.

## Understanding God’s Word

Read together Philippians 2:19-24. Timothy is introduced as one who will show “genuine concern” for the church’s welfare. What might the church in Philippi be needing at this time, and why might Paul think Timothy could be the best for meeting their needs?

Read Philippians 2:25-28. Observe the labels Paul gives to describe Epaphroditus. How does Paul think of him? Consider what might have happened if Epaphroditus never returned to Philippi. What would that mean to our experience of the New Testament?

## Applying God’s Word

Check out verse 29, and personalize the encouragement Paul gives to the Philippian church. Who in your life have you welcomed or honored because of their life of service?

How are you edified or challenged by the examples of Timothy or Epaphroditus? Share these with your group.

## Witnessing God’s Word

How might you show “genuine concern” for one another in your marriage, family or Life Group this week? Share areas of need and think about how they might be met with loving action and prayer.

Today's sermon is going to begin with a game. How many sermons have you listened to that have included a game right off the bat? Could be a horrible idea, but let's try it! This requires you to team up with the folks around you, so find your neighbor, get ready—here we go! I'm going to give you a series of questions and just see how you do together (three seconds apiece):

- 1-Who won the Heisman Trophy last year?
- 2-Who won the Ms. America contest last year?
- 3-Who won the Nobel Peace Prize last year?

How did you do? My guess is you probably didn't do all that great as a whole. How many think you get them all correct? Now for part two of this little game; I'm wondering if you'll do better on this part. And for this part, no discussing with neighbors, just answer these on your own.

- 1-Can you name a teacher or a coach that impacted your life for the good?
- 2-Can you name one person you enjoy spending time with?
- 3-Can you name a friend who helped you through a difficult time?

Chances are, you did a little better on that second part? Here's the point: when all is said and done, the people who matter the most to us are not the ones who made yesterday's headlines. **The people who make the greatest impact in our lives are those who care for us the most.**

Today, we're moving forward in our sermon series **Take Joy**, and today we're specifically looking at **Joy of Friends**. Friendship. It matters, doesn't it? Having the right kind of people in our lives can increase a sense of joy, can't it? A fun translation of Proverbs 27:9 says, "A sweet friendship replenishes the soul and awakens the heart for joy." Think about it: Who are the people in your life that you'd consider "soul replenishing"? Now I can hear some of my more introverted brothers and sisters out there shuffling in your seats, thinking to yourself... "another extroverted pastor, trying to get me together with others—the last thing I need is more "people time." I want to be left alone! And I'd prefer it if you just leave me alone this morning! Everyone needs **some alone** in their life from time to time (my wife and mother of three teenage boys will attest to that). But a **life of alone** is just no good. God said, "It is not good for man to be alone." So, we must pay attention to that. In today's day and age, we're a people starved for the real thing, aren't we? Loneliness...isolation...emptiness in the heart; these things are at epidemic proportions. And it's no surprise to us. The very definition of friendship has in a way been hijacked. In this fast-paced, technologically-saturated world you and I find ourselves in, we're starved for the real thing. Cheaper alternatives are promised through an array of social media avenues. You can be

a mile wide as far as quantity, but a millimeter deep when it comes to the quality. This can leave us relationally empty—aching for more. Knowing one another deeply, beneath the superficial layers, caring for others, and being cared for genuinely—these are our longings.

The Apostle Paul knew this. And while he certainly had many friends that partnered in his ministry, today we're going to look at two treasured friends of his: Timothy and Epaphroditus. (Anybody ever heard of Timothy? How about Epaphroditus?) You'll hear more about these two in a second, but before we go there, let me take you back and set the stage for this. Up to this point in the letter, Paul has been building the picture of what it looks like for us to be united in Christ. As His people, we are bound to Him and to one another in unity. It looks like oneness, it looks like togetherness. And since we've been united in Christ, Paul says that our behavior should look a certain way. We visited this last week: "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others" (Philippians 2:3-4). Paul says, "Hey guys, being selfish or proud, those things cannot dwell in the same house as humility and valuing others above yourselves. There's just no room for them. Looking to the interests of others, now that's what I'm looking for!"

And then in Verse 5: "In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant..." Jesus (toward the cross), our perfect example of humility, considering others' needs before His own. Today, as we return to this table, you and I have front-row seats to Christ's example of what true loving, self-sacrificing service for others looks like.

And then we get to this passage read for us moments ago, and on the surface it just looks like Paul's flow got interrupted by travel plans, doesn't it? But of course, nothing in God's Word is placed by accident. Paul introduces us to Timothy and Epaphroditus, two men he is holding up as role models, saying, "Pay attention to these men. Watch them. Model your life after them." As we head into this passage this morning friends, I want you to have two questions before you:

- 1-Who are the role models in your life? ("Show me your friends, and I'll show you your future.")
  - 2-What kind of role model is God calling you to be? ("We're all leading somebody, somewhere.")
- Those will be important questions for us as we



take a look at these two. So, let's take a look at Timothy first.

Who is Timothy? Timothy is a young man, probably between the ages of 18 and 22. (So Basecampers out there, listen up. Timothy would be running alongside you guys right now if he was here). Paul met Timothy on his first missionary journey through Asia Minor and would grow up to be Paul's protege. He was a son of a Jewish woman and a Gentile father, but he came to trust Christ as his Lord and Savior after meeting Paul. Timothy would go on to be a part of Paul's team on his missionary journeys, and as we see here, their relationship grew into quite a special partnership and friendship. Paul knows Timothy's heart, and he knows that the Philippian church could benefit from his coming, so he writes: "I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, that I also may be cheered when I receive news about you. I have no one else like him, who will show genuine concern for your welfare" (Philippians 2:19-20).

"I have no one else like him," Paul says, "who will show genuine concern for your welfare." What a statement! Can you imagine someone saying that about you? You know, there's concern and then there's genuine concern. Big difference. I think about it like this: There's a difference between leather and genuine leather. Back in high school, I got pretty excited about a wallet that was "leather" and after about three months, it had fallen apart so bad it wouldn't hold onto anything. I might as well have used a Ziploc bag or something. But then I got a genuine leather wallet that lasted me throughout my entire college education (and because I was on the five-year plan, I was very grateful! Here's the point: to be genuinely concerned for others is not a flash in the pan that's short-lived or fickle. No, genuine concern is loyal, loving and there for the long haul. That's the kind of care Paul is wanting to send back to his friends in Philippi and he knows that Timothy can bring it.

Can you imagine the marriage where husband and wife weren't merely tolerating one another, but day by day grew in genuine concern for one another? Imagine the family, that slowed down just long enough, and put phones away long enough to be genuinely concerned for each other. How about a church, First Pres, where no matter who you are, where you come from, what you're dealing with—you can rest assured that you will be met by people here who are genuinely concerned for one another? Is that the kind of church we are? Isn't that the kind of church we want to be? I know this is easier said than done, and Paul knew that this was easier said than done. Verse 21: "For everyone looks out for their own interests, not those of Jesus

Christ." It's like (Pastor) Junior (McGarrahan), who always goes on saying, "I am the center of my surrounding universe!"

But hold on, let's look at Timothy again. Paul continues: "But you know that Timothy has proved himself, because as a son with his father (See the love there? Timothy is not just some cog in the wheel for Paul; he's like a son; he's family, he's teachable, like a son with his father) he has served with me in the work of the gospel. I hope, therefore, to send him as soon as I see how things go with me. And I am confident in the Lord that I myself will come soon. So there's Timothy: A family member, a faithful servant, one who is genuinely concerned for others. Paul said, "You want to grow in your ability to be genuinely concerned, look at Timothy. There's no one like him." It's a helpful picture for us this morning, friends. Who are the people in your life that show this characteristic? How might the Spirit develop your ability to be genuinely concerned for your friends and family? I have to tell you, what got me to stick here 14 years ago was the genuine care and concern that my family and I received from many of you. It was a powerful thing then; it's a powerful thing now. May the Lord continue to develop this in us as a community.

Now, what about Epaphroditus? We don't know a whole lot about Epaphroditus, but we do know a few things. First, Epaphroditus was actually a man from Philippi and was a part of this congregation. And we know that he was sent to Paul in Rome with a financial gift. (We read about this later in the letter). Now, that little detail deserves a little bit of time here. Remember, Paul is in Rome. Epaphroditus was in Philippi, some 800 miles away! That's like going from Colorado Springs to Austin, Texas, a long way on foot to carry bags of cash. You'd think Epaphroditus would have liked to have had Venmo available! But he didn't, which I think shows his toughness. I'm guessing a little, but I would think that he was pretty tough. But, regardless, listen to how Paul thinks about him, as he is now wanting to send him back to Philippi. Verse 25: "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. (And here's why Paul wants to send him back.) For he longs for all of you and is distressed because you heard he was ill. 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. 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" (Philippians 2:25-30).

Epaphroditus: "my brother, co-worker, fellow



soldier.” Let’s look at each of these.

**My brother.** Again, like Timothy, a family word. Timothy is like a son with his father. Epaphroditus is like a brother. This is a close, kindred-kind of connection here.

**Co-worker.** For Paul, this is someone who he is working side by side with, co-laboring for the advancement of the gospel. And we know that a partnership in the gospel is very dear to Paul, something that he’s thankful for at the beginning of this letter. “I thank my God every time I remember you...and I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel...” There’s nothing better than linking arms for the partnership of the gospel. That’s a co-worker.

**Fellow soldier.** What’s a soldier? Some of you soldiers in the room can check me on this, but I like to think of a soldier as a servant first. I like to think of a soldier as someone who is familiar with sacrifice, who wakes up in the morning ready to put the needs of others ahead of themselves—no matter the cost. Someone who is willing to serve to the point of laying down one’s life. While we don’t know when Epaphroditus fell ill, we do know that he served so devotedly, he almost lost his life in service of the gospel of Christ. The Greek here gives the sense that he was on death’s doormat. A “fellow soldier,” Paul calls him, all in for the service of the gospel. Paul is so touched by who Epaphroditus has been, that he writes: “So then, welcome him in the Lord with great joy, and honor people like him, 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” (Philippians 2:29–30).

That’s Epaphroditus, our 800-mile marathoner, who Paul calls, “My brother, co-worker and fellow soldier.” Do you have friends like Epaphroditus? Maybe the better question is, are you that kind of friend? Do we see ourselves as in the same family, brothers and sisters with those seated around us today? We all come from different places, but could it be possible for us to view one another as co-laboring in God’s Kingdom, as we support, encourage and pray for one another? And fellow soldiers, where might we be willing to risk for sake of the Lord’s purposes, to sacrifice—even if it means giving up our own interests in order to serve the interests of another? May the Spirit continue to develop these things in our character as a community.

Timothy and Epaphroditus. Just two friends of Paul. But two role models that point us to what others-oriented, self-sacrificing service looks like.

Now, that’s the end of chapter two, but the end of my sermon passage goes into chapter three, and I’m about out of time, so quickly, let’s look there

Further, my brothers and sisters, rejoice in the Lord! It is no trouble for me to write the same things to you again, and it is a safeguard for you. Watch out for those dogs, those evildoers, those mutilators of the flesh. For it is we who are the circumcision, we who serve God by his Spirit, who boast in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh (Philippians 3:1–3).

In preparing this sermon, I really thought I might just tip my hat to this part of the passage, and let Tim deal with it next week. But because we’re approaching the Lord’s table today, I do want to say a few things. Paul had such a concern for his beloved church that he wanted them to be assured as to where their salvation truly comes from. They needed to beware of the imposters, those who were teaching the letter of the law and not the Spirit. They needed to beware of those who looked upon circumcision as the sign of their salvation, all the while their hearts were not right before God.

The main point is this: Ritual does not save you. Simply showing up at a church doesn’t make you a follower of Christ, just as standing in a garage doesn’t make you a car. We do not find salvation from our sins by fleshy acts of ritual. We find salvation of our sins by grace alone through faith in our flesh-torn Savior. And as we come to the table, we rejoice in the finished work of Jesus Christ and in the righteous standing He gives us before God. We come to Jesus claiming no confidence in our flesh, but in who He has said we are before the throne. Again, a helpful piece for today. You’ll hear more about it next week.

But let me end with friendship. Joy with friends. I want to show you something incredible. Jesus, the night He celebrated His last meal with His disciples, would say this: “Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends” (John 15:13). But then He would say something astounding, and I want this to be in your head and heart as you receive the body and blood of Christ today. Jesus said, “I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master’s business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you” (John 15:15).

Friends, we’ve talked about Timothy and Epaphroditus, about what it looks like for us to be on the lookout for such godly examples in our lives, to consider how we might be formed more into that kind of character. But above all, don’t miss this: The God of the universe looks upon you so lovingly, that he would call you “friend.”

