

LAUGH AGAIN: Experience Outrageous Joy

STUDY SEVEN

Friends Make Life More Fun

Philippians 2:19–30

Don't let anyone ever tell you that people are not important. When you stop and think very critically, you realize it was people for whom the Savior died. And it will be for people for whom He will one day return!

—Charles R. Swindoll

GOD works in our hearts through the ordinary people in our lives. People play a significant role in God's plan because, first, people are eternal; no one dies and simply dissolves into oblivion. We have eternal souls whose destinations are determined by our response to the gospel of Jesus Christ. Second, God normally accomplishes His work through people. What He could perfectly perform Himself in an instant, He has chosen, instead, to do through imperfect people over time. He could easily spread food before the hungry or pop in an angel to comfort the sick, but He intends for us to do those things.

Two men who took on angels' garb in Paul's life were Timothy and Epaphroditus. Together, they encouraged Paul while he was imprisoned in Rome and gave him the strength to endure. We'll meet these friends and learn to appreciate the joy God offers us through the special people in our lives as we study today's passage, Philippians 2:19–30.



PREPARE YOUR HEART

Before beginning the study, pause for prayer and ask the Holy Spirit to open your heart to His truth. He longs to shepherd you through whatever may have you feeling troubled or fearful today. You are not alone. Go to Him with great confidence and ask for His help. Take all the time you need. He is patient and loving, and He's waiting to hear your voice (*Psalms 116:1*).



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Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application

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Philippians 2:19–30



YOUR TURN IN THE SCRIPTURES

Few books of the Bible provide more line-by-line encouragement to the weary soul than the book of Philippians. Open to Philippians 2 and read the entire chapter as if reading it for the first time. Underline words or phrases that speak directly to you or your situation . . . even make notes in the margin. Then record some of what you discover in the space provided.

Philippians is about *people*. The letter flows rich with Paul's longing to be with the people at *Philippi* and his gratitude to the Lord for bringing them into his life to encourage and support him in ministry.

Can you name a few people who have encouraged you in your faith? If so, write down their names.

Skim Philippians again. How many names of specific people or groups of people did Paul reference?

Describe some of the emotions he expressed about these individuals.



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People occupy the center of God’s story, from Genesis to Revelation. That’s why when a biblical writer makes specific mention of individuals—just as Paul did with his two friends and fellow servants of the gospel, *Timothy* and *Epaphroditus*—it carries unusual significance. At a time when Paul would soon face heaven, these individuals made all the difference on earth.



Observation: Two Friends and Fellow Servants—Philippians 2:19–30

According to the *Searching the Scriptures* method of Bible study, we observe the text by looking for words or sections that are compared, contrasted, emphasized, repeated, or related. We look for central ideas. Paul commended two individuals to the Philippian church and highlighted their usefulness on behalf of the gospel.

Timothy: A Friend and Son in the Faith—Philippians 2:19–24

The first individual Paul commended to the church at Philippi was Timothy.

If the Lord Jesus is willing, I hope to send Timothy to you soon for a visit. Then he can cheer me up by telling me how you are getting along. I have no one else like Timothy, who genuinely cares about your welfare. All the others care only for themselves and not for what matters to Jesus Christ. But you know how Timothy has proved himself. Like a son with his father, he has served with me in preaching the Good News. I hope to send him to you just as soon as I find out what is going to happen to me here. And I have confidence from the Lord that I myself will come to see you soon. (Philippians 2:19–24)

Using your observation skills, identify the characteristics of Timothy that Paul highlighted, and record them below.

What reason(s) did Paul give for sending Timothy to Philippi?



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Paul compared his relationship to Timothy to that of a father and son. According to Paul, how did that unique bond play out in their ministry (Philippians 2:22)?

Based on Paul's commendation of Timothy to the Philippians, how would you characterize Paul's feelings toward Timothy?

Epaphroditus: A Minister of Encouragement—Philippians 2:25–30

The second individual Paul highlighted is a man by the name of Epaphroditus. Read the following passage that describes this remarkable friend of Paul.

Meanwhile, I thought I should send Epaphroditus back to you. He is a true brother, co-worker, and fellow soldier. And he was your messenger to help me in my need. I am sending him because he has been longing to see you, and he was very distressed that you heard he was ill. And he certainly was ill; in fact, he almost died. But God had mercy on him—and also on me, so that I would not have one sorrow after another.

So I am all the more anxious to send him back to you, for I know you will be glad to see him, and then I will not be so worried about you. Welcome him in the Lord's love and with great joy, and give him the honor that people like him deserve. For he risked his life for the work of Christ, and he was at the point of death while doing for me what you couldn't do from far away. (Philippians 2:25–30)



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Paul used several words or phrases to describe Epaphroditus (Philippians 2:25).

1. “He is a true _____”
2. a “_____”
3. a “_____”
4. “And he was your _____”

Epaphroditus clearly meant much to Paul and to the Philippian Christians. He served Paul and the church even to the point of risking his life for them.

What are some of the emotions Paul described to explain Epaphroditus’ relationship to the Philippian church?

Now that we have a better understanding of the importance of these two men, we can turn our attention to grasping Paul’s motive for including their stories in his letter to the Philippians.



Interpretation: Who People Are and What People Do

Interpretation is the step in your Bible study that answers the question, *What does the text mean?* Using your observations, you can begin to gain insight into what the original author, in this case Paul, intended to convey. In each section below, take a few minutes to think through the reflection questions aimed at discovering the meaning of Paul’s words.

Paul had an ongoing desire for the believers at Philippi to continue to grow in their knowledge of Christ and in their devotion to Him (*Philippians 1:3–11*). Yet, because Paul was in prison, he could not visit the Philippians personally.



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Isn't it significant that Paul, unable to go and minister to the Philippians, was comfortable sending Timothy and Epaphroditus in his place? I think that shows remarkable humility and an often hard-to-find maturity in Christian leaders today. We must resist thinking so highly of ourselves that we miss sharing the joy of serving Christ with others. —Chuck Swindoll

Knowing that Paul was prevented from ministering personally to these dear Christians, how does that help you understand the importance of both Timothy's and Epaphroditus' ministry?

Paul had a two-fold hope for sending Timothy to visit the Philippians. What did Paul hope Timothy would accomplish on his behalf (Philippians 2:19)?

What did he hope Timothy would accomplish on behalf of the Philippians (2:19, 22–23)?

Based on Paul's words, how would you expect he'd wish the Philippians to respond to Timothy's visit?



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How did Epaphroditus serve both Paul and the Philippian believers?

Epaphroditus most likely acted as a personal courier for a sizeable financial gift the Philippians sent to Paul. How does knowing that explain the significance of the peril he faced on his journey (Philippians 2:30)?

How did Paul want the Philippians to respond to Epaphroditus when he visited them again (2:29)?



Correlation: Focusing on Christ with Friends

Correlation compares passages of Scripture to help interpret the passage in view. Nearing the end of his life and facing certain execution at the hand of Rome, Paul wrote tenderly to Timothy again, reminding him of the importance of keeping the focus on Christ. But the aged apostle took particular comfort in the faithful encouragement of friends, albeit only a few, who remained committed to him all the way to the end.

Timothy, please come as soon as you can. Demas has deserted me because he loves the things of this life and has gone to Thessalonica. Crescens has gone to Galatia, and Titus has gone to Dalmatia. Only Luke is with me. Bring Mark with you when you come, for he will be helpful to me in my ministry. I sent Tychicus to Ephesus. When you come, be sure to bring the coat I left with Carpus at Troas. Also bring my books, and especially my papers. . . .



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Give my greetings to Priscilla and Aquila and those living in the household of Onesiphorus. Erastus stayed at Corinth, and I left Trophimus sick at Miletus.

Do your best to get here before winter. Eubulus sends you greetings, and so do Pudens, Linus, Claudia, and all the brothers and sisters.

May the Lord be with your spirit. And may his grace be with all of you. (2 Timothy 4:9–13, 19–22)

Paul's tender farewell bares overtones from his heartfelt expression of affection toward the Philippian believers. How do Paul's final words confirm the importance of godly friendships in the work of the gospel?



Application: Three People Who Deserve a Response

Application moves us from maintaining a mere intellectual understanding of a passage to allowing truth to penetrate the heart. God in His goodness has likely brought individuals into your life too. Chuck wants you to be prepared to respond in a way that honors God and takes full advantage of the gift of others, so he offers three practical principles to follow:

1. When God brings a Timothy into your life, He expects you to relate to that person. That means making a commitment to *cultivate a close and lasting relationship*.
2. When God sends an Epaphroditus to minister to you, He expects you to respect him or her. That means being willing to *open your life up to someone's assistance and encouragement*.
3. When God sends His Son across your path, if you are an unbeliever, He expects you to receive Him. That means you humbly and willingly *believe and surrender*.



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Which of these three people has entered your life and deserves your response? In what ways can you respond?



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, how grateful the apostle Paul remained even to the end for his closest companions who, though many others deserted him, stayed at his side in his last hours. Thank You, Lord, for faithful, loving friends, though rare, who have courageously loved me and who have never left my side in this walk of faith on earth. Bless each one, Father, in the name of Christ and for His sake, amen.

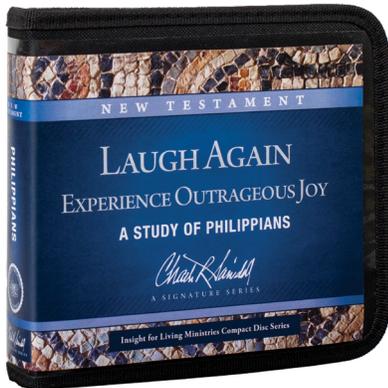


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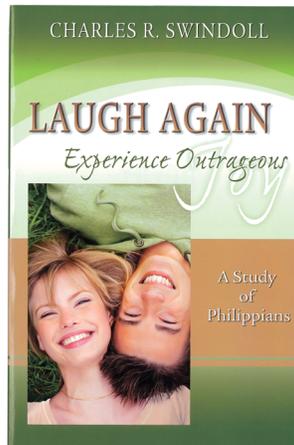
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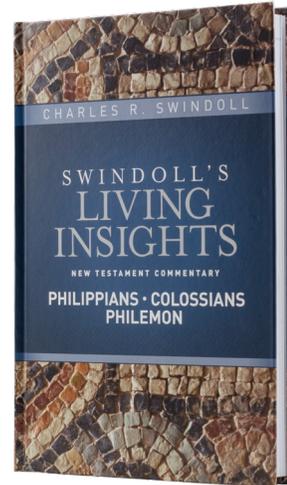
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