

Rethinking Your Heroes

A Study of Philippians 2:19-30

Characteristic of Completeness: Giving Away My Life

Big Idea: A hero's life is a liturgy.

Related Scriptures: Matthew 6:25-33; 16:24-27; 25:36-40; Luke 12:22-31; Acts 20:24; Romans 12:1; 1 Corinthians 7:32-35; 10:23-24, 31-33; 12:14-26; 2 Corinthians 5:14; 2 Timothy 2:3-4

Introduction:

- A. Randall Wallace is a devout Christian who nearly finished his Master of Divinity degree from Duke Divinity School. But instead of becoming a minister, he became a filmmaker. He has written numerous films which carry the theme of heroism. You've probably seen or heard of some of ► them: *Braveheart*, *Pearl Harbor*, *The Man in the Iron Mask*, *We Were Soldiers*.

In a recent interview, Wallace ► commented:

Doesn't everybody love stories about heroes? They grab our attention, they make our hearts pound—but only if we believe them, only if we can identify with them in some way and hope that to some extent we can become more like them.¹

I ► suspect most of us have a hero or secretly want to be a hero. Maybe win the Nobel Prize for a scientific breakthrough. Maybe hit a walk-off homerun to win the World Series. Maybe write a bestselling book. Maybe start your own highly successful company, go public, and cash out. Maybe be on the cover of TIME magazine as person of the year.

- B. But this does raise an important question: What are the characteristics of a true hero? What constitutes a hero in God's eyes? Who is truly heroic and worth emulating?

These are the questions we're going to consider this morning. Our text for the week is Philippians 2:19-30. In this text, the Apostle Paul presents and profiles two individuals.

This is unusual. Customarily Paul refers to specific people by name at the end of his letters. But in this case, Paul presents two people in the middle. I think he does this because the two people serve as models for the argument he's been making. You see, starting with Philippians 1:27, Paul has been challenging the Philippians and us to live our lives "in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ." And now in our text, he gives two examples of people who have done just that. They are heroes. He describes them as men of "proven worth" (v. 22) to be held in "high regard" (v. 29). They are heroes.

¹ Available from <http://www.christianitytoday.com/movies/interviews/randallwallace.html>; internet; accessed 18 October 2006.

Let's read the text in its entirety; then we'll go back through and catalog the traits of a real hero; then we'll consider what difference they make in our lives. Paul ► writes,

^{NAU} Philippians 2:19 But I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you shortly, so that I also may be encouraged when I learn of your condition. ►
 20 For I have no one *else* of kindred spirit who will genuinely be concerned for your welfare. ► 21 For they all seek after their own interests, not those of Christ Jesus. ► 22 But you know of his proven worth, that he served with me in the furtherance of the gospel like a child *serv*ing his father. ► 23 Therefore I hope to send him immediately, as soon as I see how things *go* with me; 24 and I trust in the Lord that I myself also will be coming shortly. ► 25 But I thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier, who is also your messenger and minister to my need; 26 because he was longing for you all and was distressed because you had heard that he was sick. ► 27 For indeed he was sick to the point of death, but God had mercy on him, and not on him only but also on me, so that I would not have sorrow upon sorrow. ► 28 Therefore I have sent him all the more eagerly so that when you see him again you may rejoice and I may be less concerned *about you*. ► 29 Receive him then in the Lord with all joy, and hold men like him in high regard; 30 because he came close to death for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete what was deficient in your service to me.

- I. Well, ► that is our text. Paul introduces the first hero in ► Verse 19. His name is Timothy. Paul says,

^{NAU} Philippians 2:19 But I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you shortly, so that I also may be encouraged when I learn of your condition.

Who is Timothy? Timothy had become a coworker and fellow missionary with Paul at a very young age.² You may recall that Timothy was with Paul when he first preached in Philippi.³ So the Philippians know him.

In some ways, Timothy is an unlikely hero. In Acts 16:1 we learn that his father was a Greek and his mother was a Jew who became a believer in Jesus. In the religious culture of the first century, mixed parentage was not a plus.

About six years before Paul wrote the letter to the Philippians, he sent Timothy to Corinth to try to deal with some serious problems in that church.⁴ It appears that Timothy failed to turn

² *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, vol. 5, s.v. "Timothy," by B. Van Elderen (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1975, 1976), 752.

³ Acts 16:1, 3; 17:14.

things around at Corinth and returned to Paul.⁵ Such failure is not what you'd expect on the résumé of a hero.

Moreover, at the time of Paul's writing to the Philippians, Timothy was still a young man—so young that some questioned his maturity as a leader. Within a year of writing the letter to the Philippians, Paul wrote a letter directly to Timothy.⁶ In the letter, he told Timothy,

^{NAU} 1 Timothy 4:12 Let no one look down on your youthfulness . . .

The clear implication is that some did indeed look down on his youthfulness. And based on further study of Paul's letters to Timothy, one scholar gives this profile of Timothy:

*. . . he was a fairly young man who was somewhat retiring, perhaps even a bit shy. He appears to be sincere, and devoted, but at times perhaps frightened by his opponents and their teachings. This perhaps is also reflected in his apparent inability to cope with the problems in the Corinthian church.*⁷

Timothy does not appear to be hero material; he looks like just an ordinary guy. And yet, Paul says of Timothy in ► Verse 22,

^{NAU} Philippians 2:22 But you know of his proven worth

The term ► “proven worth” comes from the Greek word that describes personal character that has been tried or tested and approved.⁸ The adjective form, *dokimos*, means approved or certified as genuine. And the word, *dokimos*, has been found on the bottom of many ancient pieces of pottery unearthed by archaeologists in the Near East.⁹ The pottery vessel that bore the *dokimos* mark was the one that had passed successfully through the fire of the kiln without cracks.

Here we have our first hint that maybe true heroism is not about having a résumé full of success and accomplishments because Timothy didn't have such a résumé. So is it possible that the scientist who gets fired for failure to discover anything could be more heroic than the one who gets the Nobel Prize? Is it possible that the guy who strikes out every time could be more heroic than the guy who hits a walk-off homerun to win the World Series? Is it possible that the person who never gets published could be more heroic than the one who writes a bestseller? It's possible.

⁴ 1 Corinthians 4:17; 16:10; cf. Harold Hoehner, “A Chronological Table of the Apostolic Age,” presented by Wayne House, *Chronological and Background Charts of the New Testament*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 130, 132.

⁵ Van Elderen, 753.

⁶ Timing based on Hoehner's chronology presented by House, 132.

⁷ Van Elderen, 753.

⁸ Joseph Thayer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, s.v. “δοκιμή,” (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1977).

⁹ Charles R. Swindoll, *James: Practical and Authentic Living*, (Fullerton, CA: Insight for Living, 1991), 18.

So ► what *are* the characteristics of a true hero? What constitutes a hero in God’s eyes? From our text, we learn a number of things about Timothy’s “proven worth” as a hero.

A. First, ► Timothy is genuinely concerned for the well-being of others. I get this from ► Verse 20, where Paul says,

^{NAU} Philippians 2:20 For I have no one *else* of kindred spirit who will genuinely be concerned for your welfare.

1. The term, ► “kindred spirit” describes someone who is like-minded or someone who has the same attitude.¹⁰ In this case, it’s Timothy who has the same attitude as Paul.¹¹ And we have already seen that Paul is himself concerned about the well-being of others, the Philippians in particular.¹²
2. The word, ► “concerned” means to attend to or to care for someone else’s welfare.¹³ The term, ► “genuinely” suggests that, while some may merely profess to have concern for others, Timothy is the real deal.
3. The phrase, ► “for your welfare” includes the Greek preposition, *peri*, which means around or on all sides.¹⁴ We get the English word, “**perimeter**” from it, which describes the border all around something. We get the word, “**pericardium**” from it, which is the membrane that is all around the heart.

This little preposition conjures up an image of a bubble. Each one of us has our own little bubble; we’re surrounded by the things that interest and affect us directly. The ordinary and natural course is to selfishly focus on your own bubble.

But Timothy breaks outside his own bubble. Timothy cares about the things all around the Philippians—their circumstances, their struggles, their issues, their world. That’s what heroes do: They break outside their own bubble.

¹⁰ W. Bauer, F.W. Danker, W.F. Arndt, and F.W. Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 3d ed., s.v. “ἰσόψυχος,” (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), hereinafter abbreviated BDAG.

¹¹ Gordon D. Fee, *Paul’s Letter to the Philippians, The New International Commentary on the New Testament*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1995), 266; Peter T. O’Brien, *The Epistle to the Philippians: A Commentary on the Greek Text, The New International Greek Testament Commentary*, eds. I. Howard Marshall and W. Ward Gasque, (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1991), 318.

¹² As evidenced by Philippians 2:17, for example.

¹³ BDAG, s.v. “μεριμνάω.”

¹⁴ Timothy Friberg, Barbara Friberg, and Neva Miller, *Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament*, s.v. “περί,” (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2000).

- B. The second heroic thing about Timothy is that ► he seeks after the interests of Christ Jesus. I get this from ► Verses 21 and 22, where Paul says,

^{NAU} Philippians 2:21 For they all seek after their own interests, not those of Christ Jesus. 22 But you know of his proven worth, that he served with me in the furtherance of the gospel like a child *serv*ing his father.

1. Timothy’s “proven worth” is that he sought the “interests” of “Christ Jesus,” and ► “he served . . . in the furtherance of the gospel.” That’s the test of a Christian hero. The word, “served” means “to act or conduct oneself as one in total service to another.”¹⁵ It is to “perform the duties of a slave.”¹⁶
2. The simile, ► “like a child serving his father” compares Paul and Timothy to a father and son. In the ancient world, most sons ended up in the job of their fathers.¹⁷ If your father was a carpenter, you would probably become a carpenter. Your father would train you for the job. You would work side-by-side with him. Paul was Timothy’s spiritual father, and he trained his son to serve the interests of Christ.

Serving the interests of Christ includes working to become more and more like Christ and helping others do the same. In the metaphor I used a few weeks ago, serving the interests of Christ includes hoisting the sail of biblical application, allowing the wind of the Holy Spirit to empower us and take us wherever He wants us to go.

3. According to Paul, this is in stark contrast to ► “all” the other believers who “seek after their own interests.”
 - a. The term, “all” probably refers to those with Paul in Rome who were available to send. I don’t think Paul is saying that absolutely everybody he knows is self-seeking, but just the ones he knew in Rome who could have made the trip to Philippi.¹⁸
 - b. The phrase, “seek after their own interests” means to devote serious effort or to strive for one’s own advantage.¹⁹

Things haven’t changed much. In Paul’s day and in ours, many of us are just too busy with their own interests to seek the interests of Christ.

¹⁵ BDAG, s.v. “δοιλέω.”

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ D.A. Carson, *Basics for Believers: An Exposition of Philippians*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1996), 74.

¹⁸ O’Brien, 321.

¹⁹ BDAG, s.v. “ζητέω.”

I wonder about the specific circumstances that prompted Paul to comment on the selfishness of the believers around him. Did he put the word out that he needed someone to deliver the letter to the Philippians? Did he get a response like, “Hey, I’d love to, but I’ve got a really important deadline to meet at work, and I can’t afford to lose this client”?

Did he get a response like, “Hey, I’d love to, but I’ve got to drop off the kids at soccer at 3:00, and I’ve a pedicure at 3:30, and then I’ve got to pick up the kids and be back home by 4:30 because we’re having the carpet cleaned”?

Did he get a bunch of responses that were all variations on the theme: “I’ve got to take care of everything in my own bubble before I can think about things on the outside”?

Could it be that many of us are striving to be the wrong kind of hero? Could it be that many of us are trying to be a “best-bubble” hero, when in reality God is calling us to be a “bust-bubble” hero?

Too hard to think about now. We’ll return to this later.

- C. So, ► Paul holds up Timothy as a hero for at least two reasons: He is genuinely concerned for the well-being of others, and he seeks after the interests of Christ. And these two ideas are not mutually exclusive; they are interrelated. In fact, we are serving the interests of Christ when we serve the interests of others.²⁰
- D. I would like to take a moment to provide a word of encouragement to those of you who may be single. I’m unaware of any first-century demographic studies that would confirm this, but I suspect that singles are disproportionately represented among the heroes of the New Testament. Timothy was single. Paul was single. Jesus was single. All in a culture in which it was not hip to be single.

And, if you think about it, this not only makes sense, it’s biblical. In 1 Corinthians 7, beginning with Verse 32 Paul explains that being single can actually be an advantage in serving the interests of Christ. Singleness can afford a freedom and an undivided concentration in serving Christ that most married folks simply do not have.

I know this can sound cheesy coming from me, a married guy who doesn’t fully appreciate how hard singleness can be, but on the authority of Scripture, you singles have a leg up on heroism. So, I urge you to think of your singleness in a new light—not as a curse, but as an advantage.

²⁰ Fee, 260.

- II. That brings us to the second hero in our text. His name is Epaphroditus. He is introduced in ► Verse 25. Paul says,

^{NAU} Philippians 2:25 But I thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus . . .

Who is Epaphroditus? Epaphroditus is a member of the Philippian church. We don't know much about his background. But inasmuch as he lived in Philippi, an ancient Greek city, and inasmuch as his name is derived from the name of the Greek goddess, Aphrodite,²¹ it is probably safe to assume he is Greek.

At the time of Paul's writing to the Philippians, Epaphroditus was with him, having been sent from the church in Philippi to deliver a care package, including some money. In ► Verse 25, Paul describes Epaphroditus to the Philippians as . . .

^{NAU} Philippians 2:25 . . . your messenger and minister to my need

Later, in ► Philippians 4:18, Paul says,

^{NAU} Philippians 4:18 . . . I am amply supplied, having received from Epaphroditus what you have sent . . .

You may recall that Paul was in prison in Rome. In that day, prisoners like Paul were not cared for by the Roman government; their needs, including food, had to be supplied by friends and family.²² So Epaphroditus had come, making the trip of over 1,000 miles, over land and sea, to deliver provisions.²³

And now, Paul is sending Epaphroditus back to Philippi, bearing Paul's letter to the Philippians. Paul says in ► Verses 28 and 29,

^{NAU} Philippians 2:28 Therefore I have sent him all the more eagerly so that when you see him again you may rejoice and I may be less concerned *about you*. ► 29 Receive him then in the Lord with all joy, and hold men like him in high regard

To hold ► "in high regard" means to esteem him, to honor him, to respect him greatly.²⁴ It is to consider Epaphroditus a hero. From our text, I glean a number of things that make Epaphroditus heroic.

- A. First, ► he serves undaunted by adversity. I get this from ► Verse 25, where Paul describes Epaphroditus as . . .

²¹ O'Brien, 329.

²² Fee, 276.

²³ Distance traveled estimated based on maps provided in BibleWorks.

²⁴ BDAG, s.v. "ἐντιμος."

^{NAU} Philippians 2:25 . . . my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier . . .

The ► three terms belong together and present a general-to-specific progression.²⁵

1. The term, ► “brother” indicates that he is a fellow believer.
2. The term, ► “fellow worker” indicates that he is a believer who works for Christ. Not all believers are workers. A “fellow worker” is Paul’s most commonly used term for those believers who have worked with him for the gospel.²⁶
3. Finally, the term, ► “fellow soldier” describes a worker who has faced and fought adversaries and conflicts side-by-side.²⁷ Not all workers are soldiers. A soldier serves undaunted by adversity. Such soldiers are not distinguished by the absence of fear, but by the courage to push through fear by faith. True heroes are soldiers, not just believers, not just workers.

- B. Another heroic ► attribute of Epaphroditus is a big one that, in a sense, encompasses all the others. Epaphroditus lives his whole life as a ministry. His whole life is an act of worship. He ► offers his entire life as a liturgy to God. Let me show you what I mean by that. In ► Verse 25, Paul describes Epaphroditus as a . . .

^{NAU} Philippians 2:25 . . . minister to my need

Also, in ► Verse 30, Paul describes him as one sent . . .

^{NAU} Philippians 2:30 . . . to complete what was deficient in your service to me.

1. The words ► “minister” and “service” are built off the same Greek word.²⁸ It’s the word from which we derive our English word, liturgy. It’s a word that was commonly used to describe a formal religious service or a public worship liturgy.²⁹ In fact, in the Greek translation of the Old Testament, the word was “used almost exclusively for the service of priests and Levites in the temple.”³⁰ “Service” is the worship event. “Minister” is the person involved in the worship event.
2. The idea is that Epaphroditus’s whole life is worship.³¹ So something as ordinary and mundane as delivering provisions to someone in prison is an act

²⁵ A single definite article modifies all three terms. O’Brien, 330.

²⁶ Fee, 275.

²⁷ O’Brien, 331.

²⁸ BDAG, s.v. “λειτουργός” (minister) and “λειτουργία” (service).

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ O’Brien, 332.

³¹ Carson, 77.

of worship for Him. His life is a liturgy lived out for God. He sets aside his own selfish interests, he gives away his own life in service to God and others.

So the big idea of my message is ► this: A hero's life is a liturgy. It's about giving away my life for God. And that's our ► Characteristic of Completeness for the week: Giving Away My Life.

Elsewhere in the Bible, Paul urges us to give our lives away, to heroically offer our lives as a liturgy. For example, in ► Romans 12:1, Paul says,

^{NAU} Romans 12:1 Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, *which is* your spiritual service of worship.

Living life as a liturgy is heroic.

- C. Yet another heroic attribute of Epaphroditus is that ► he is concerned about how his life affects others.

We learn from Verse 27 that, on his way from Philippi to Rome, Epaphroditus became ill and almost died. Some have speculated that Epaphroditus did not travel alone; others would have gone with him to protect the considerable sum of money he carried.³² If this is so, perhaps when Epaphroditus became gravely ill, one of his traveling companions returned to Philippi bearing the news of his illness.³³ In any case, the Philippians had somehow heard the troubling news, and didn't know that he had since recovered.

In ► Verse 26, Paul explains to the Philippians that he's sending Epaphroditus back home . . .

^{NAU} Philippians 2:26 because he was longing for you all and was distressed because you had heard that he was sick.

What is remarkable here is that Epaphroditus almost died, and yet he's "distressed" over his friends' concern for him. He is acutely aware of and concerned about the impact of his life on others. At a time when I would be trying to milk a little sympathy for my brush with death, Epaphroditus is concerned about the emotional burden he has become to his friends.

- D. A final heroic trait is that Epaphroditus ► risks his life for the work of Christ. In ► Verse 30, Paul says his fellow soldier is worthy of high honor . . .

³² Fee, 278.

³³ Ibid.

^{NAU} Philippians 2:30 because he came close to death for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete what was deficient in your service to me.

1. The phrase, ► “to complete what was deficient in your service to me” may sound critical or derogatory, but it’s not.³⁴ It’s simply of way of saying that the monetary gift carried by Epaphroditus fulfilled the Philippians’ service to Paul.
2. The term, ► “risking” literally means to hand over.³⁵ In this case it means to hand over the life or to expose oneself to danger or to boldly risk one’s life.³⁶
3. The causal connection between bringing the gift from Philippi and risking his life suggests that Epaphroditus became ill en route, but pressed on at the risk of his own life.³⁷
4. Most of us will never have to risk our physical life for the sake of Christ. But all of us will have to risk our non-physical life if we want to follow Christ. We may have to risk our reputation, or our wallet, or our time, or our comfort zone, or our security, or our big house, or our pride. In one way or another, a true hero risks his life for the work of Christ.

III. How ► are we to apply all this? What difference do all these heroic traits make in your life and mine? I have ► three suggestions.

- A. First, ► identify the heroes. We can use the biblically heroic traits to rethink who the true heroes really are. The traits we have discovered today are so radically countercultural, they call for a change of thinking.

In our contemporary Mr. American Hero pageant, we “ooh” and “aah” as the contestants strut the runway, representing the states of narcissism, athleticism, solipsism, hedonism, egotism, capitalism, and triumphalism. And then, two nerds, two nobodies, Timothy and Epaphroditus reluctantly shuffle onto the runway. And before security can apprehend the unwanted intruders, the voice of God thunders, pressing all the tuxedos and glitter gowns back into their seats: “I crown them.”

The true heroes are disguised. We need to retrain our eyes to see them. I believe there are heroes all around us—heroes that don’t have résumés full of successes and accomplishments. Instead, they have hearts full of the character of Christ. They are concerned for the well-being of others. They seek after the interests of Christ. They serve undaunted by adversity. They offer their lives as a liturgy to God. They are

³⁴ O’Brien, 344.

³⁵ Friberg, s.v. “παραβολεύομαι.”

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Fee, 283; Moisés Silva, *Philippians*, 2ed. *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament*, eds. Robert W. Yarbrough and Robert H. Stein, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1992, 2005), 139.

concerned about how their life affects others. And, they risk their lives for the work of Christ.

- B. Second, ► applaud the heroes. We need to celebrate the true heroes in our midst. We need to hold them up before our children so they know what true heroes look like. It's a big mistake to allow our culture to teach our children how to identify and applaud heroes.

This week, I invite you to ask God to help you identify a hero. Maybe you could discuss this at dinner. Who is a real hero? Maybe it's someone in your family. Maybe it's someone in your Life Group. Maybe it's a friend or coworker. Whomever God brings to your mind, consider how you can applaud them. Perhaps with an encouraging note or phone call—just something to let them know you think they are heroic. We need to applaud our heroes, just as Paul applauded Timothy and Epaphroditus.

- C. Third, ► be a hero. This gets back to hard question I posed earlier. Could it be that many of us are striving to be the wrong kind of hero? When it comes to the interests of Christ, is your life a liturgy? Or a lethargy?

This week, I invite you to take this list of traits from Timothy and Epaphroditus, and ask God to show you when, where, how, and with whom He may want you to be more heroic. Sandwich them in your Bible. Stick them on the bathroom mirror. Slide them onto your dashboard. Make them your screensaver. And keep asking God over and over again: "Lord, when, where, how, and with whom do You want me to be more heroic?"

The good news is that every believer has the ability to be a hero. The traits are accessible to every believer. Every believer can get there no matter where you are now, no matter how badly you've blown it. It takes no special gift. It does not entail a certain social status. There are no prerequisite degrees. It requires no extraordinary talent. Just a willingness to give away your life. A willingness to make your life a liturgy.