

# KINGDOM COMPANIONS

SERIES: TENACIOUS TOGETHER



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Philippians 2:19–30  
Sixth Message  
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*Philippians 2:19–30*

Mark Schaefer.

Not many of you know who he is. In fact, I'll bet only my wife does. To all of you, Mark Schaefer is just a name of a person you don't know. Another one of the six billion people you've never met.

But not to me. Mark was my youth pastor in high school. He is a person of great gifts and passion for Jesus. He had an incredible influence on my life. God used him to transform the faith I inherited from my parents into a vibrant commitment to Christ. It was during those years I first felt the call to become a pastor.

Even though you've never met Mark Schaefer, you know him. Or at least a part of him. Because you know me. His name is more than just a name to you because he is a part of me.

In our passage this morning, we're going to hear the names of two men none of us has ever met. But these two people had an enormous influence on the life of the apostle Paul who wrote the book of Philippians. Because of that, they are important people to us, too.

We've been studying this book in our series we've called *Tenacious Together*. We've been examining the main themes of this book of persevering for the cause of the Gospel and finding unity as a church in that process. Last week we heard Scott Grant exhort us to become involved in community. You can't have unity without community.

This week we see how the general call for community is made concrete by the apostle Paul. We're going to meet these two people who are so important to him. The apostle doesn't just talk about community. He shows us how it works with real people.

For us, we're going to be thinking about the real people we have in our life. We'll learn how we go about finding kingdom companions.

The Bible contains a lot of abstract ideas. But this is not a book of ideas. It is a book about people. Someone counted 3,237 people referenced in the Bible. That's a lot of people in 30,000 verses. Each of those is not just a name on a page. They are individuals with mothers and fathers and joys and trials. They are people who lived this story God is telling in the world.

If we're going to be tenacious together for the sake of the Gospel, this is not something that happens in our heads. It's not an abstract principle. It's a reality playing out with the people in this room—the actual men and women who are sitting next to you and standing with you on the patio.

We want to be about people. We want to be about each other.

This morning, I'll ask you to take several practical steps. We'll meet two people in the apostle Paul's life. So, I'll invite you to think of two specific people in your own life. I'll explain a bit about who these people should be when we get to them. The point is that I want you to make this message concrete. You are going to walk out this morning with action items having to do with actual people in your life.

When we looked at this passage in our elders' meeting, Steve Holmlund commented that a passage with two people makes it hard to have three points for a sermon.

Fear not. We'll still have three points. Two people are no problem at all. First, we'll look at Timothy. Then we'll think about Epaphroditus. Finally, as we think about specific people, I'll suggest a way to think about what it looks like to do what Paul describes earlier in the book: "to strive side by side for the sake of the Gospel."

## Timothy

Let's remind ourselves of a little background. Paul is in prison as he writes this letter. He and Timothy and Silas founded the church in Philippi several years earlier. The church has just sent him a gift—probably a financial

contribution—that is meant to be of help in his current circumstances.

Paul is writing this letter and sending it to them by way of the same person who brought the gift on behalf of the church. We'll meet this person in the next section. Paul starts by talking about Timothy.

### **Philippians 2:19-24:**

**I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, so that I too may be cheered by news of you. 20 For I have no one like him, who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare. 21 For they all seek their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. 22 But you know Timothy's proven worth, how as a son with a father he has served with me in the gospel. 23 I hope therefore to send him just as soon as I see how it will go with me, 24 and I trust in the Lord that shortly I myself will come also.**

This is a very strong endorsement of Timothy. Paul makes sweeping statements about how there's no else like Timothy; he alone seeks the interests of Christ; he has proven his worth, and more. Paul wants to be very clear about how valuable Timothy is.

Remember, the Philippians knew Timothy. He was part of the group who planted the church. It's fair to ask why Paul feels compelled to be so complimentary of Timothy. Perhaps, initially, some people might not have had the best impression of Timothy. One commentator suggests that they may have thought poorly of Timothy and Paul is trying to repair his image.

I had a friend in college who once told me, "You're a lot more interesting than I thought you were when I first met you." I had to think for a moment whether that was really a compliment.

I don't think the Philippians clicked with Timothy the first time around. But, he was incredibly important to Paul, and Paul wants them to know what an incredible person Timothy is.

Paul met Timothy during his visit to the city of Lystra. He was immediately impressed with him and brought him along when he left the city. They continued to travel together for years. They became close. Of all Paul's companions, Timothy seems to be his protégé. He was the one to carry on the mantle. He was the apprentice, favored by the master.

You can feel the depth of relationship in Paul's words. There is intimacy, admiration, shared experience, dependence on each other. You can almost hear the stories of danger at sea, long nights on the road, persecution from Romans, and sharing small victories of someone receiving the Gospel together. Paul and Timothy have a history together.

As I listen to Paul talk about Timothy, I can't help but wonder about my own life. Do I have someone like this? Who would I describe this way? Who are the people with whom I have connected on this level?

Paul and Timothy shared a mission together. They didn't just grab a coffee every few weeks to talk about their lives. They had a common purpose and goal. We'll be speaking in a few minutes about community groups. It's important to surround ourselves with other people to walk through life together. But what Paul and Timothy shared was even more profound.

God doesn't just offer us a community with which to talk about life. He provides us with a team to pursue our mission together. If we want to find the kind of relationship that Paul had with Timothy, don't just put yourself in a community. Join a team.

You can have a community without shared purpose. But you can't share purpose without creating community. Coming together around a common goal always builds a community between people.

We're reading a book as a pastoral staff called "*Disunity in Christ*." The author, Christena Cleveland, talks about why there is so much division within the church along ethnic, political, and social lines. At one point she tells a story of two rival high schools who had to combine their sports programs.

As a combined team played together, she observes, "Magically, the divisions between the North and Henry High volleyball players crumbled when the groups actually spent time together in pursuit of a common goal."<sup>1</sup>

I'm not sure we feel we are in pursuit of a common goal. It can feel like we're just a group of people getting together. Sometimes we get lulled into thinking that our goal is only to get by in life and not have too much difficulty.

The church of Jesus Christ is more than just a community. We are a team with a common goal. Find a team that interests you and join it. And if you don't

see a team, then start one. We have many types of needs in our community. Talk to a pastor, and we'll help and encourage as you pull together a team for your passion.

Now, here's the practical challenge. You may not have a relationship like Paul has with Timothy. But think of someone who comes close. Maybe you're the Paul, and the other person is the Timothy. Or perhaps you're the Timothy, and you're thinking of a Paul. This is someone with whom you have some history. You've gone through some stuff together.

This is not an abstract idea. You're thinking of a person with a name. A real character in the story of your life.

Reach out to that person this week. Contact them. Reconnect. Add one more log to the fire of your friendship. Maybe there's an opportunity to partner together. Perhaps not. That's okay. Your first challenge is to reconnect with an old friend with whom you've shared a mission.

## Epaphroditus

Paul said that he'd like to send Timothy to visit the Philippians, but that he won't do it right away. He needs Timothy for more important things first. Instead, he is sending back the messenger whom they sent to carry the gift to him. That man's name is Epaphroditus. Listen to what Paul says about him.

### Philippians 2:25-30:

**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, 26 for he has been longing for you all and has been distressed because you heard that he was ill. 27 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. 28 I am the more eager to send him, therefore, that you may rejoice at seeing him again, and that I may be less anxious. 29 So receive him in the Lord with all joy, and honor such men, 30 for he nearly died for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete what was lacking in your service to me.**

Once again we see Paul speaking very highly of this man. Notice how intentional he is to describe a personal

connection, even though he doesn't know Epaphroditus all that well. He says that he is "my brother" and "fellow worker" and "fellow soldier."

Again, it's worth asking why he feels the need to do this. The most likely answer is that when the Philippians sent Epaphroditus to Paul with a gift, they expected it to be a long-term thing. He was supposed to go and be a part of Paul's team for some extended period.

Epaphroditus became extremely ill either along the way to reach Paul or once he arrived. Travel in the ancient world was always dangerous. And illness was usually fatal. Generally, in the first century, if you got sick, you died. It wasn't normal to recover from an illness.

But Epaphroditus recovered. Paul calls it a miracle from God. Now he's sending the messenger back, but not because he failed. Paul highlights the fact that Epaphroditus "nearly died for the work of Christ." This man risked it all. He wasn't a failure at all.

Paul wants the Philippians to "receive him with all joy" for the risks that he took; not conclude that he failed his mission.

A friend of mine from seminary trained to be a missionary in the Middle East. He wanted to go where Christianity was illegal, and churches were underground. I mentored a young man from this church whom we recently sent out as a missionary. His ultimate hope is to serve in North Korea: one of the most closed countries in the world. As I've traveled to India and Kenya, I've met pastors and leaders whose lives are constantly in danger because they have dedicated themselves to the work of Christ.

Some followers of Jesus do risk it all for the Gospel. Their stories are inspirational and admirable. They can also be extremely discouraging. What are we doing? I'm going home after church to rest and watch TV. My life isn't in danger for the work of Christ. Most of you aren't in danger, either. What does that mean for us? Are we failing somehow?

No. Of course, it's possible that God is stirring you to do something and you're not paying attention. We are certainly all called to take risks for the sake of the Gospel. But notice how Paul says that Epaphroditus risked his life to "complete what was lacking in your service to me."

His statement isn't a criticism of the Philippians. It's another acknowledgement that we have different roles on

the same team. There are things I can do that you can't. There are things that you can do that I can't. And there are things that someone else can do that none of us can.

Do you feel like a failure? Is there a voice in your head telling you that you haven't done enough? Or that other people are so much better at following Jesus than you? None of that talk is from God. You may not have risked your life, but you've risked other things. You have been a faithful servant.

Once we're okay with how God has called us, we can celebrate people who have been called in different ways. Our team needs people like Epaphroditus who are willing literally to risk their lives. But if all we're doing is feeling guilty about our own inadequacies, we can't ever support anyone else.

Be where God has called you. Don't feel guilty about it. Then, find someone like Epaphroditus and "receive them with all joy." First, we talked about joining a team. Now we can think about supporting a teammate.

As a church, we support over a dozen missionaries working in different parts of the world. Also, we are connected to more than a dozen partner organizations that do vital work locally and internationally. We try to give you opportunities to get to know the different efforts serving the Gospel.

Our goal as a church is to get you connected to people and organizations you're excited about. We don't want to be a clearinghouse for money. We don't want to collect all your resources you might want to share for the work of the Gospel and then distribute it out to those things we feel are worthy.

We want for you to build relationships. Paul and Timothy had a deep, long-standing friendship. Epaphroditus was a newcomer. Paul didn't know him nearly as well. But Paul still speaks of him with such tenderness. They had grown close in a short time.

First, I asked you to think of someone specific you could connect with that you'd known for some time. A longer-term partner in faith. Now I'd like to give you a second challenge. Find someone new. Find someone with a passion you think is interesting.

Listen to their story. Meet up with that person or send them an email. Hear about their heart. Be inspired. Please don't allow their enthusiasm and passion make you feel guilty. That's one of the worst tricks of the

enemy. Support them. See if you can consider them to be a fellow soldier.

You're okay. You're doing fine. Don't question yourself. Just listen to what God is doing through someone else and be excited about it.

## **What about us?**

We've now seen this picture of how deeply the apostle Paul feels toward these two people. Timothy, his long-standing friend and protégé, who has been through so much with him and Epaphroditus, a new and bold brother who risked his life for the sake of the Gospel to serve Paul.

These people were bound by something bigger than themselves. It was larger than their personal faith in Christ. It was broader than their connection to a church. They were caught up in the mission of the kingdom of God.

A few years ago I got involved with a group called Transforming the Bay with Christ. At first, it was just a handful of business professionals, nonprofit leaders, and pastors gathering together to get to know each other and brainstorm about how we can collaborate for the sake of the Gospel.

I didn't realize it at the time, but my involvement with them became a huge turning point in my life. I've been part of PBC for over twenty years. I attended here in college, went through the intern program, left to be trained at seminary, and then came back as a pastor. This church has played a central role in so much of my spiritual formation.

There's a great benefit to that. God has used it in powerful ways. But there's also a downside. There can be a danger to getting so locked into a particular organization that you can't see what God is doing elsewhere. The biggest danger for me was that other churches and other organizations started to feel like competitors. That's a terrible thing.

Over the past few years, I've been getting to know other pastors. We've worked together on various events and projects like Beautiful Day. We've shared ministry together, and we've shared personal stuff together. Just this week I gathered in East Palo Alto with thirty pastors from our region and heard about how God has been using the church in that city to make significant change. One of the pastors at that gathering said, "I didn't realize



until I came here how much I needed to lift my head up to see what's been going on around me."

All of this has been giving me a new perspective on the kingdom of God. It's so much bigger than I thought. There are people like Timothy and Epaphroditus and even the apostle Paul all over the Bay Area doing incredible things.

I feel like I used to follow Jesus in a valley of my own life. Now I've climbed to the top of a mountain, and I've gotten a glimpse of how vast his kingdom really is. We start by following Jesus in our own life. Of course, that also means finding a community in a local church. But finally, there is an awareness of something even bigger.

Jesus told a story while he was on earth about our tendency to worry about all the things going on in our lives. That's so true of me. But he gave the antidote to that worry in the form of something else to focus on.

#### **Matthew 6:33:**

**But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.**

This word for seeking the kingdom is the same word that the apostle Paul uses to describe how Timothy didn't seek his own interests, but those of Jesus Christ. I used to read this statement from Jesus and think that it meant something like "try to be a good person and live righteously and things will go well with you."

Now I think it means more than that. Timothy and Epaphroditus are models of what it looks like to seek the kingdom of God. Paul doesn't praise their lack of sin or how good of a job they did avoiding all the bad things in the world. He praises their dedication to the cause of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

These two people can be an example to us of the same thing. Don't focus on being a good Christian. Don't even focus on serving your church. Seek the kingdom of God. Be kingdom minded.

Here's what happens: when you are kingdom minded, you start spending time with people who are also kingdom minded. Over time, you find a deep sense of connectedness and community. The irony is that when you care more about how God's kingdom is advancing than your own needs, you'll find that your needs are being met along the way. You'll find community. You'll find deep friendship. You'll find people to support you

when things fall apart. Because you'll be seeking the kingdom together."

Jesus told a lot of stories about what it's like to be kingdom minded. It's selling everything to buy a field where you've found something of value. It's planting a seed and watching it grow one hundred-fold. It's the multiplication of yeast and the value of treasure and the hope that can come from small beginnings.

Being kingdom minded doesn't have to be big and exciting and larger than life. It's just about a mindset that you are here to be a part of a team working for the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It is true that when you dedicate your life to the kingdom, all your needs will be met.

So think again about those two specific people. One with whom you have some history. Another who is newer to you. How can you be kingdom minded together with them? What does that look like? Not just pursuing Jesus on your own. Not just plugging into a church. Do those things. You can't skip them.

But don't stop there. Can you see the vastness of God's kingdom? Can you see that you are part of a team with the kingdom as its only goal?

Don't be "you minded." Don't even be "church minded." Be kingdom minded.

## **Conclusion**

I began by introducing you to Mark Schaefer, who has had a huge impact on my life. As a high school student mostly concerned with fitting in, he helped me to see the love of Jesus. Then we heard about two particular people who played a big part in the story of the apostle Paul. I've invited you to think of two specific people in your own life.

And I've asked us to be kingdom minded. To think about the vast work of God in this world and to understand that we are a part of it.

Here's an abridged definition of "kingdom" from Merriam-Webster: "an organized community headed by a king." <sup>2</sup> That's us. The reason that we can be kingdom minded is that we share the same king.

Our common confession is simple: "Jesus Christ is Lord." That is a statement of allegiance to a kingdom. Jesus is our king. We are his people. So it might seem big and ambitious and grand to be "kingdom minded." But it happens through these simple relationships. Through

kingdom companions, working together for the sake of the Gospel.

Find a team to be a part of. Support a teammate. Work for the kingdom. But don't let the kingdom be an abstract idea. It's filled with names of actual people. Pick two and reach out. Find your kingdom companions.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Christena Cleveland, *Disunity in Christ* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2013), 153.

<sup>2</sup> "kingdom." Merriam-Webster.com. 2018. <https://www.merriam-webster.com> (13 May 2018).