

In the late 1700's while the British empire was expanding its reach for more land, wealth and eventual world domination, in Northamptonshire, England a shoemaker named William Carey was looking at a hand drawn world map and was weeping for the lost around the world. He felt God's calling to take the good news to the people in India. He knew it was a one-way ticket for him; the journey itself would be dangerous and upon reaching India there would be a language barrier, cultural differences and hostility towards the message of the gospel. Even then he was determined to take this step and he told his dear friend Andrew Fuller **"I will go down in the pit, if you hold the rope"** this one saying defined the rest of their lives as Fuller responded with a commitment that he would never let go of that rope.

That one moment became a picture of Christian ministry: at times we are called to go down in the pit—into danger, suffering, and sacrifice—and at times we are called to stand above, faithfully holding the rope through prayer, support, and partnership.

When we come to Philippians chapter 2, Paul has already given us the greatest example of this kind of life—the Lord Jesus Christ. In verses 6 to 11, we see Christ, who, though He is God, humbled Himself, took the form of a servant, and became obedient to the point of death on the cross.

This is the standard of humility. This is the mind of Christ that every believer is called to have.

But if we are honest, while we intellectually love this example of Christ, it can feel far beyond us. Christ's humility is perfect, sinless, and divine—we see it, we admire it, but we often struggle to know what that looks like in our everyday lives.

And that is exactly why Paul continues the chapter the way he does. He does not leave us with only the example of Christ; he gives the people of Philippians and to us two ordinary, faithful men—Timothy and Epaphroditus—men the Philippians would have seen and known personally and this would help them understand this beautiful humility of Christ is possible even in their own lives. What might look like a simple travel log is Paul's way of showing to us what it looks like to live with the mind of Christ—through one who holds the rope, and one who goes down into the pit.

I have divided today's study into two key points if you haven't guessed it already. The first one is The one who holds the rope (v19-24) and the second point is The one who goes down in the pit (v25-30). Let's look at

The one who holds the rope

V 19 But I trust in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you shortly, that I also may be encouraged when I know your state.

What better place to start this passage than “I trust in the Lord Jesus”, Before Paul speaks about Timothy’s care, Epaphroditus’ sacrifice, and his own desire to come, he places all his plans under the Lordship of Christ.

Paul was a man with many plans but was never controlled by his plans because he learnt from experience not to presume upon tomorrow. Think of his journey in Acts 16, Paul and his companions intended to go into Asia, but the Holy Spirit prevented them. They tried to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them. Then God redirected them through the Macedonian call, that is how the gospel first came to Philippi.

Now, even in prison, with real uncertainty of what is going to happen to him next, Paul speaks as a man full of hope, a hope that is submitted to the will of Christ. This is not just theology but this is how he lived.

So when Paul says, "I trust in the Lord Jesus," this is not a throwaway phrase. This is the language of a man who has learned that Christ rules not only over salvation, but over schedules, delays, closed doors, open doors, and ministry plans.

When we are controlled by our own plans, we become anxious and inward-looking — our hands are full, but full of our own agenda. But when you surrender that control to Christ, your hands are free to hold the rope for someone else's welfare. And this leads Paul to Timothy — a man who was not consumed with his own interests, but genuinely cared for the welfare of others.

So what does a faithful person who is holding the rope look like? Paul gives us three qualities in Timothy.

The first quality is like-mindedness.

Paul says in verse 20, “For I have no one like-minded, who will sincerely care for your state.”

That word “like-minded” carries the idea of being of equal soul, or kindred spirit. Paul is not saying that Timothy had the same personality, and preference that he had. He is saying that Timothy’s heart was moving in the same direction. Timothy shared Paul’s burden for the people of God and Paul’s concern for the things of Christ.

This is important because a person can only hold the rope well when his or her heart is not pulling in a different direction. If I am seeking my own interests, my own comfort, and my own agenda with no common goal with the person in the pit then when things get difficult or metaphorically when the rope becomes heavy, I will be tempted to let go. But Timothy was different. His concern was not forced, it wasn’t formal, or superficial. Paul says he would sincerely care for their welfare.

Paul trusted Timothy because Timothy would not merely deliver Paul's message; he would carry Paul's heart for the people. Their minds were so united in Christ that Paul knew Timothy would represent not only his words, but also his ways, his spirit, and his concern for the church which was shaped by Christ.

We see this in 1 Corinthians 4:17, where Paul says:

"For this reason, I have sent Timothy to you, who is my beloved and faithful son in the Lord, who will remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach everywhere in every church."

So, like-mindedness does not mean we all become copies of one another losing our different gifts, personalities, or backgrounds. We are not here trying to produce identical people. Scripture describes the church as one body with many members. The parts are different, but they are not independent. When one member suffers, the others suffer with it. When one member is honored, the others rejoice with it.

That is what like-mindedness looks like in the church. We may serve in different ways, but we are united by the same Lord and same gospel.

And when our hearts are truly aligned in this way, it will show itself in how we care for one another.

That is why the second quality of someone who holds the rope is Christ-centred concern.

Christ-Centered Concern

Paul says in verse 20 that Timothy would "sincerely care" for the state of the Philippians. Then in verse 21 he gives the contrast: "For all seek their own, not the things which are of Christ Jesus."

That is a sobering statement. Paul is not saying that Timothy was simply more talented, more impressive, or more naturally gifted than everyone else. What made Timothy stand out was that he genuinely cared and this quality of genuine concern for others Paul found it to be rare. It can be rare even in believers, believers like you and me we might be so caught up in own lives that we are unable to care for others around us. That's why Paul mentions things which are of Christ Jesus, it literally means to care about what Christ cares for and if we know anything about Christ, we know how deeply He loved and cared for His people.

And this kind of Christ-centered concern does not usually grow in a hurry. It grows as we spend time with God's people. It grows when church is not treated as a place where we arrive just in time for the sermon and leave as quickly as possible afterwards. If we never slow down enough to know one another, we will rarely notice when someone is weary, discouraged, drifting, or silently carrying a burden.

When that happens, we may still be standing near the rope, but we are no longer truly holding it.

Sometimes holding the rope begins with very ordinary things and I would challenge you to try it next time stay back after the service to speak with someone, ask them how they are really doing, catch up with people during bible studies, invite someone for a meal, pray with them, notice when they are absent

And when this kind of concern is genuine, it does not fade when circumstances change. It endures. It becomes visible over time.

That is why the next quality of someone who holds the rope is **proven character**.

Paul says in verse 22, "But you know his proven character, that as a son with his father he served with me in the gospel."

That phrase "proven character" carries the idea of something tested and shown to be genuine. We can picture a metal that has been put through the fire to burn away the dross, proving its purity. Philippians weren't guessing about Timothy. They had seen him in the heat of ministry. They had witnessed his faithfulness when things got difficult. They knew his service was not an act.

And notice where Timothy's character was formed. Paul says, "as a son with his father he served with me in the gospel." Timothy did not develop this character in isolation. He developed it by serving alongside Paul in the work of the gospel.

That is important for us. Proven character is formed in the ordinary places of obedience. It is formed when we serve when no one notices, when we keep our word, when we show up again, when we carry burdens quietly, when we remain faithful even when the work is inconvenient.

The person who holds the rope needs this kind of character. When someone is down in the pit, they need someone reliable to hold the rope for them.

Think back to our story: William Carey would never have confidently stepped into that "pit" in India if he didn't know who was at the other end of the line. He didn't just need a "volunteer"; he needed someone with a proven character he could stake his life on. He found that in Andrew Fuller.

As we look at Timothy, we have to ask ourselves: **"Is my character proven?"**

If the "fire" of a crisis, an inconvenience, or a difficult person would enter in your life this week, what would be left behind? Would it be the pure gold of Christ-like service, or would it just be the smoke of self-interest?

Brethren, God is not looking for the most "gifted" people in this room; He is looking for "proven" people. People who have been through the fire of daily obedience and have come out the other side with a heart that beats for the things of Jesus Christ.

Before we move on, let me talk about something that often rises in our hearts.

When we hear about people like Timothy, Epaphroditus, Paul, William Carey, Andrew Fuller, or missionaries who suffer faithfully for Christ, we may admire them — but at the same time think, "I could never be like that. God uses people like them, not people like me."

Or maybe we bring it closer to home. We look at someone in the church who seems more prayerful, more mature, more gifted, or more godly, and we quietly think, "If God is going to use someone, surely He will use that person, not me."

But that kind of thinking is not humility. It can actually become a form of unbelief. It assumes that usefulness in God's kingdom depends mainly on our natural strength, our personality, our confidence, or our ability.

But Scripture shows us something different. God called someone who felt weak in speech to be His voice. He called a shepherd to be the king, he called a fisherman to proclaim His good news and I can go on and on with people that God has used and we see Paul stating the same that God chooses the weak things of the world to shame the strong.

So why not you, why not me? I don't need to be impressive enough all I need to be is faithful

Let it not be the case in this church where your pastor has only few people around him that show genuine interest in the things of Christ but may it be that he can count on each one of you like Timothy who are ready and willing to serve. And next time if you see God working through someone, Praise God for how he is using that person and stop and say to God that you are willing and ready for whatever he has in store for you.

The One Who Goes Down in the Pit

And now Paul turns our attention to another faithful man — Epaphroditus.

If Timothy shows us the faithfulness of the one holding the rope, Epaphroditus shows us the courage and sacrifice of the one who goes down in the pit.

The first quality we see in Epaphroditus is **loyal partnership**.

Paul calls him "my brother." which indicates that they shared the same spiritual DNA, they were both bought by the blood of Christ

He then calls him a “fellow worker.” That means he did not merely observe the work of the gospel from a distance. He shared in the labour.

Paul then calls him a “fellow soldier.” That tells us the work was not easy. There were hardship, opposition, and danger.

And then Paul says he was “your messenger and the one who ministered to my need.” He represented the Philippian church. He carried their love, their support, and their concern to Paul.

So Epaphroditus was a man joined to others in the work of Christ. He was loyal to Paul, loyal to the Philippian church, and loyal to the mission of the gospel.

This is important because no one goes down into the pit faithfully if they are only committed to themselves. If my life is centered on my own comfort, my own safety, and my own convenience, then I will step back when the work becomes costly.

Others-Focused Love

The next quality that Paul talks about in Epaphroditus is others-focused love.

Verse 26 says that he was “longing for you all and was distressed because you had heard that he was sick.”

Epaphroditus was the one who had been seriously ill. Paul tells us in verse 27 that he was sick almost unto death. And yet, his distress was not over his own condition. He was troubled because the Philippians had heard about his sickness and were worried about him.

That shows us the kind of man he was. Even in weakness, his heart was turned outward.

There is a beautiful circle of love in this passage. The Philippians love Epaphroditus, so they are worried when they hear he is sick. Epaphroditus loves the Philippians, so he is distressed that they are worried. Paul loves both sides, so he is sending Epaphroditus back so that the church may rejoice and Paul may be less sorrowful.

This is Philippians 2:3–4 being lived out in real life: “Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.”

Epaphroditus shows us that going down in the pit does not mean becoming self-absorbed. Even when he was the one suffering, he still cared about the hearts of others.

That is others-focused love.

Courageous Sacrifice

But Epaphroditus did not only care deeply. He risked greatly.

The next quality we see in him is courageous sacrifice.

Paul says in verse 30, “because for the work of Christ he came close to death, not regarding his life, to supply what was lacking in your service toward me.”

We are not told exactly how Epaphroditus became sick. It may have been through the journey, his service to Paul or the hardships connected to ministry, or through some combination of these. But Paul tells us what matters most: his suffering was connected to the work of Christ.

He risked his life and was exposed to real danger, not for his personal glory, but “for the work of Christ.”

That is what makes his risk different from recklessness. The Christian is not called to love danger for danger’s sake. We are not called to be careless with our bodies, our families, or our responsibilities. But we are called to value Christ and His work above our own comfort and self-preservation.

And then Paul says he did this **“to supply what was lacking in your service toward me.”** That does not mean Paul was rebuking the Philippians. He was simply stating the logistical reality, the Philippian church was nearly 800 miles away. They couldn’t physically be there to minister to Paul and what they couldn’t do they were able to do it with the help of Epaphroditus’ faithful ministry. He became their hands and feet and a vessel through which they could bless Paul’s ministry. He went down into the pit on their behalf.

This is what courageous sacrifice looks like. It sees a need, counts the cost, and steps forward because Christ is worthy.

Maybe the risk that you will face is not life threatening—maybe it's a risk of losing your job for standing for the gospel at work, or the risk of sharing the gospel with a family member or friend knowing it may change the relationship. Maybe it's being ridiculed, overlooked, or treated differently because your values don't align with the culture around you. Maybe it's giving sacrificially—your time, your money, your energy—when it would be far easier to keep it for yourself. It's choosing to serve in the church when your week has already been long.

And before we conclude, notice what Paul says in verse 29: "Receive him therefore in the Lord with all gladness, and hold such men in esteem."

Paul is telling the church to honour Epaphroditus.

That is a word for us as well. How often do we notice the people among us who are faithfully serving? Do we honour them? Do we thank them? Do we encourage them? Or do we take their faithful service for granted?

Faithful servants are not to be used up and forgotten. They are to be valued, supported, and honoured.

Conclusion

So as we come to the end, Paul has placed before us two faithful men.

Timothy who displays qualities of one who holds the rope and Epaphroditus shows us the one who goes down into the pit

And in the life of the church, we need both.

And these roles are not always separate. In fact, this passage shows us that they often overlap.

Paul is in the pit — he is in prison, facing uncertainty, suffering for the gospel. And yet even from the pit, he is holding the rope for the Philippians by sending Timothy to care for them and sending Epaphroditus back so they may rejoice.

There will be seasons where you are holding the rope for someone, and seasons where you are the one in the pit. And there will be times when you are doing both at once.

This brings us back to the story we began with.

William Carey the shoemaker from England went to India. He laboured there for over forty years. With his team, he translated the complete Bible into six major Indian languages and portions of Scripture into dozens more. He established schools and fought for the abolition of widow burning.

But when Carey was on his deathbed, he told a fellow missionary, "When I am gone, say nothing about Dr. Carey. Speak about Dr. Carey's Saviour. And he requested the following to be put on his tombstone: "A wretched, poor, and helpless worm, on Thy kind arms I fall."

He died in the pit, still holding onto the grace of God.

And back in England, for over two decades, Andrew Fuller had faithfully held the rope. He travelled extensively across Britain raising funds, wrote theological defences for the mission, and defended Carey's name when critics called it a waste of time.

Fuller died years before Carey, his hands metaphorically scarred from a lifetime of holding the rope for his friend.

People like William Carey, Andrew Fuller, Timothy, Epaphroditus, Paul, and many others — they either went down into the pit or held the rope. But all of them were looking to the same Person, not only as their example, but as their Lord and Saviour: Jesus Christ.

Jesus is the ultimate example of one who goes down to the pit. He did not just risk His life — He gave it. He did not just go into a pit of sickness or hardship — He went into the pit of death itself. And He did it not for His own sake, but to rescue us when we could not save ourselves.

And that changes everything.

Because if Christ has gone into the deepest pit on our behalf, then no act of service we are called to is without meaning, and no act of faithfulness is wasted.

So the question is not, "Can I be exactly like Timothy, Epaphroditus, Carey, or Fuller?"

The question is: "Lord, where have You placed me, and how are You calling me to be faithful?"

And maybe that faithfulness will not look dramatic.

You may not be Timothy, sent as Paul's trusted representative. You may not be Epaphroditus, risking your life on the journey.

But perhaps God is calling you to be like Lois or Eunice — Timothy's grandmother and mother — who quietly and faithfully taught him the Scriptures from childhood. Their names are not as well known as Paul's, but God used their ordinary faithfulness to shape a man who would later serve the church powerfully.

Maybe your ministry is in your home, teaching your children the Word of God. Maybe it is discipling a younger believer. Maybe it is praying faithfully. Maybe it is showing up week after week, serving quietly, giving generously.

So, brethren, as we leave today, consider this: if Pastor Nick were writing about your life to another church, what would he say?

Would he be able to call you like-minded? Would he say you sincerely care for the welfare of others? Would he point to your proven character? Would he describe you as a brother, a worker, a soldier?

Or would there be silence?

That is not meant to condemn you. It is meant to stir you. Because by the grace of God, that kind of life is available to every believer in this room.

And may it not be said of us that the work of Christ was left only to a faithful few.

May God make us a church full of people who hold the rope and people who go down the pit.

People who care deeply. People who serve faithfully. People who risk courageously.

And above all, people who are ready to say 'Not my will, but Yours be done.'