

**THE VALUE OF FAITHFUL FRIENDS****Philippians 2:19-30****(Read Philippians 2:19-30)**

**Intro:** There is nothing like the reunion of friends. I have often been amazed at the way friends can be apart for years, with maybe a contact here or there, but when they get together and hug one another and wipe happy tears away, how they simply pick up where they left off.

I have a friend, his name is Ed. We did lots of ministry together over the years, especially when we were youth pastors as we combined our large youth groups and travelled on huge mission trips. When I moved into a senior pastor role in the late '90s we did less together but our friendship flourished. In 2005 I moved here to Ohio and we lost contact. Not because we stopped our friendship but because he seemingly dropped off the grid. He had fallen into an illicit affair, his marriage crumbled and he disappeared. Over the years I often thought about him and made an inquiry or two but was unsuccessful – until about two years ago when Ed contacted me. With much brokenness he shared his journey and how, even though he had made such a mess of things, God still had a plan for him and had redeemed him. His ministry would never be the same, that was true, but Ed was a forgiven and restored man. It was SOOOOO good to hear his voice. It was so good to know how God restores brokenness and it is so good to be restored to my friendship with Ed.

As you know I spent three years at Navajo Mission. I travelled there 50 years ago this coming August at the age of 18. My first year I ran the farm which meant caring for the pigs, chickens and beef cattle. I also milked the cow morning and night. I was also the gym teacher at the mission boarding school. I was the soccer and basketball coach and I loved working with the Navajo kids. The school administration saw that love I had for the kids and they made me the Boys Dorm Supervisor for grades 4 – 6. I was 19 years old and responsible for kids only a few years younger than myself. As I began my first year in this role, I decided I need to lay down the law right away. I told them that after lights out they had 15 minutes to get all the talking out of their system. After that, I would announce that it was quiet time and any rule breakers would receive a swat with a paddle. The very first night I heard talking in the quiet time – and I went into the room to find Leo, the sweetest kid in the dorm was the guilty party. He got the swat and his face crumbled and he wept bitter tears. I returned to my own room and I cried bitter tears. I never spanked other kid. But I bore that guilt of Leo's bitter tears for close to 40 years until in a conversation with several of them I confessed my years of guilt for my ill-conceived discipline plan. Leo was one of those guys in on that conversation and he had no recollection of it at all. Arnold healed me with "You carried that all these years?! You were always the best! We always loved you! You need to forgive yourself!" And all of them concurred. You cannot imagine the sense of freedom Arnold's words gave me! My "boys" are my friends and friends bring healing.

Someone has said, "Friends are the flowers in the garden of life." and it's true. Every one of you can come up with similar stories to what I've just told. All of us know the value of faithful friends.

Paul shared about that in the text I read as I opened this talk. His friends in Philippi were very concerned for him and they had sent their emissary, Epaphroditus to bring him some money and other needed items and he was to stay and render whatever assistance the Apostle needed. Now Paul knows it's time for him to send Timothy along with Epaphroditus back to Philippi so they know that their boy is okay and so they know Paul is standing strong.

Let's take a quick look at Paul's young friends and why they were so valued by him.

Right away you can see that . . .

**They were there for Paul**

- Think about it, Paul was in Rome to face the emperor for a capital crime. He was guilty of worshipping someone other than Caesar. And this Caesar was Nero – not one to be trifled with – since he was several bricks shy of a load. So for Timothy and Epaphroditus to be associated to Paul was not a safe thing at all. This was a time when most friends would get scarce. Not so with these two – they stood faithfully at Paul's side.
- As we study him we know that Timothy shows up in Acts 16 for the first time. Then we have two letters actually written to him and several more that he actually helped Paul write. Timothy was wherever Paul was. Indeed, Paul refers to it here in verse 22 that he was Timothy's spiritual father, but he was also a very good and a very faithful friend.

- Similarly, Epaphroditus had left everything he knew to serve his congregation by serving Paul. He was there because he wanted to be – danger or not. Paul, being the good friend that he was knew that Epaphroditus needed to go back to Philippi. They had gotten word that he had been deathly ill and they needed to see their native son was okay.
- On top of this all . . .

#### **Timothy knew what Paul knew**

- He could easily stand in for Paul. Since Paul couldn't go – his best option is to send Timothy to be his emissary and mouthpiece.
- A good friend represents his friend faithfully and accurately.
- And what you can see here is . . .

#### **Paul sent the best**

- He really wanted to go himself, but he obviously could not. Who ya gonna call? We know that Philippi was a favorite place, the church there were his dear friends, so of course, he would have loved to have been there himself. But he couldn't. So he sent Timothy and Epaphroditus.
- One thing we notice as we look at the Book of Acts and all the way through holy history is that the best are always sent out and not selfishly kept home. Paul sent the best to his best friends in Philippi. It was the least he could do.
- This is because he knew that . . .

#### **Trusted friends are worth their weight in gold**

- Think about that literally. The price of gold on Friday as I wrote these words, was \$2,932.29 per ounce (It dropped \$100 by the time the market closed at 4:59 PM but this is just for illustration) Now, the average American man is 200 lb. That means his worth in the weight of gold, would be roughly \$9,400,000. Yes, that's ridiculous, but it's true. The value of a faithful friend is actually incalculable.
- Paul sent these two young men because he knew that he could count on them. He also knew that good friends give everything. A good friend is closer than a brother and he knew he could count on them. Indeed Proverbs tells us, . . . *there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.* Proverbs 18:24b. Paul knew that and he experienced it. Good friends give all. Be a friend
- Finally . . .

#### **It hurt to see them go – but Paul sent them anyway**

- This is similar to what I just covered but it bears emphasis – you don't hold back, instead, you send the best. That's exactly what Paul did and he left it all in God's hands.
- That's what faithful friends do.

**Conclusion:** By now you're probably thinking of someone this fits in your life. You may also be thinking, how does this fit my friendship? Keep thinking. Savor those faithful friends and be one yourself. We need to show the world the value of faithful friends. Amen.