

**"Pressing on with the Mission"  
Risking All for the Gospel  
Philippians 2:25-30**

**Introduction**

- [Slide #1] This won't surprise any of you. When I was a kid I was a fairly risk adverse kid. Not that I didn't have my fair share of danger and corresponding bumps and bruises growing up. I did. I just didn't go out of my way looking for something dangerous to do like some kids.
- It wasn't until college and I met my freshman year roommate John Weber that my whole view of risk really changed. If there's one word that describes my lifelong friend John it's the word risk. Just to give you an idea, when John was busing tables in college, he would routinely eat the leftover food off of people's plates. I'm thinking food borne illnesses. Hepatitis. And John sees opportunity. Larger pieces of steak, leftover fried shrimp, you name it—he's eaten it.
- In college John used to ride the elevators in the dorm. Unlike the rest of us he used to ride on top of the elevators, not in them.
- One more quick story. On one trip to Michigan, I believe, John decided to climb a sapling as high as he could, and while clinging to the top, bend the sapling far enough so that he could jump to larger nearby tree and climb down that tree. He's twenty-five, thirty-feet in the air and—I can't remember if he fell as he jumped or just fell. But he falls, lands on his back, barely misses impaling himself on a nearby stump. That's John Weber. His occupation now? He's a stockbroker.
- At any rate, one of the life lessons I learned from John is the value of risk; that really in some sense risk is the spice of life. A life without risk is boring. He was the perfect roommate and balance for me and he continues to be one of my best friends.
- I want you to think for a second about this thing called church and risk. Imagine a hypothetical scenario in which churches stopped taking kingdom risks. Imagine what would happen if Jesus' followers stopped taking risks for the sake of the gospel. Think about the mission of the church; the mission of making disciples who make disciples who make disciples who make disciples. Imagine removing risk from the equation. The mission would grind to a halt wouldn't it?

**Transition**

I think that one of the main things we can take away from **Philippians 2:25-30** is that...[Slide #2]

**Big Idea**

- **The mission of the church dies without some serious risk-taking**
- Riskless Christianity isn't healthy for the mission Jesus launched. In order for the mission of the church to be sustained long-term somebody, more than one person, needs to be taking some kind of risk for Christ, for the sake of the gospel, otherwise the mission of the church dies.

- By the way I'm not talking about being stupid for Jesus. In July 2008 a pastor and ten others were busted in Kentucky for handling venomous snakes during their religious services. Authorities confiscated 42 copperheads, 11 timber rattlesnakes, three cottonmouth water moccasins, a western diamondback rattlesnake, two cobras and a puff adder.<sup>1</sup> That's not even Christianity. That's not the kind of risk taking I have in mind.
- I'm talking about risk taking associated with the mission, the mission of making disciples who make disciples who make disciples. Without some element of risk the good news of Christ crucified for sins, that bright light that is meant to shine in the darkness stays hidden and the mission dies—and correspondingly this thing called church dies.

### Transition

Let me give you the skeleton on which the flesh and bones of this message hangs. This section of Philippians is about a guy with a funny name, Epaphroditus. Get all the giggles out now. This passage is about risk; the risk Epaphroditus took for the sake of keeping the mission of the early church alive and kicking. Just as Timothy was set up as an example in [verses 19-24](#), Paul now sets up Epaphroditus as an example to be followed. [Philippians 2:25-30](#).

### Organizational Sentence

- **Two characteristics of those who are aren't afraid of risk and are therefore mobilized for mission**

### Background

- Paul makes it clear that the service and sacrifice and risk Epaphroditus underwent was for Christ and the mission. Paul says in [verse 30](#) of Epaphroditus *he almost died for the work of Christ, risking his life to make up for the help you could not give me*. Epaphroditus almost died as a result of the mission.
- Epaphroditus' part in the mission of bringing Christ crucified and raised to people was rather mundane. Paul is the star quarterback. Epaphroditus is the no-name offensive lineman. [Verse 25](#). Epaphroditus was a messenger. He was the liaison, the link between Paul who was in prison in Rome and the church in Philippi. No FedEx. No UPS. No postal service. Just people ferrying messages from place to place. And we know from [Philippians 4:18](#) that the church in Philippi gave to Epaphroditus the task of journeying 1200 miles from Philippi, with a gift of money, to Rome in order to supply Paul's needs in prison.
- [Moises Silva](#) does a good job of summarizing the whole background behind what Paul writes here. He says, "Within a few months of Paul's arrival in Rome, the Philippians had become aware of [Paul's] worsened situation. They, therefore, mounted their efforts and raised a large monetary gift [which is why Paul thanks the church for that gift in chapter 4, verse 18.]
- The Philippians, however, were undergoing some serious difficulties themselves. Opponents of the Christian community were causing great alarm in the congregation...Physical needs were producing anxiety among the members, who had begun to wonder whether their Christian faith was capable of sustaining them. All of those facts combined to create disagreements, distrust, and a poisonous spirit of self-seeking."

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<sup>1</sup> © 2008 *The Associated Press*. July 12, 2008. URL: <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/25651899/>

- “Conscious of how much they were in need of spiritual help and guidance, they dispatched Epaphroditus with the gift and asked Paul to keep him as his assistant but to send their beloved Timothy back to Philippi. On the way to Rome, Epaphroditus fell gravely ill and was unable to fulfill his mission [in a timely fashion]. A report of his setback reached Philippi, causing great [distress—even disappointment]. Eventually, however, God spared Epaphroditus, who, at the risk of his life, continued on to Rome. By the time Epaphroditus reached Rome, Paul had been in prison perhaps for one year. [Epaphroditus’ report] of the problems in Philippi required immediate attention, but their request that Timothy be sent to them could not be granted. More and more people had deserted Paul, and Timothy alone could minister to him.”<sup>2</sup> And so Paul sends Epaphroditus, with the letter to the Philippians back to the church in Philippi.
- Because the church would have been slightly shocked to see Epaphroditus instead of Timothy, in verses 25-30 Paul’s praises Epaphroditus and the risk he took for Christ. He urges a heroes welcome for Epaphroditus. In the armed services the **Commendation Medal** is given for sustained acts of heroism or meritorious service. You can almost imagine a medal ceremony as the church reads these words about Epaphroditus.

### Transition

You with me? Zero in on [verses 25-27](#) and listen how Paul’s describes his relationship with Epaphroditus. What does it take to be and stay on mission for Jesus? [[Slide #3](#)] **A war-time mentality.**

### Main Points

- Listen. *But I think it is necessary to send back to you Epaphroditus, my brother, fellow worker and fellow soldier, who is also your messenger, whom you sent to take care of my needs.* <sup>26</sup>*For he longs for all of you and is distressed because you heard he was ill.* <sup>27</sup>*Indeed he was ill, and almost died. But God had mercy on him, and not on him only but also on me, to spare me sorrow upon sorrow.*
- Look at the text. Look at how Paul describes Epaphroditus. First a brother. Then a fellow-worker. Fellow-worker or co-worker is Paul’s most common term for those who have labored with him in the gospel. But Paul goes one step further. He calls Epaphroditus a *fellow-soldier*. “With reference to Epaphroditus, the imagery is that of a wounded comrade-in-arms, who is being sent back home for rest.”<sup>3</sup>
- Those two words in our English translation, *fellow soldier*, are a window into Paul’s thinking about what he and Epaphroditus were doing. They labored for the gospel. Paul himself had been shipwrecked for the gospel. He had been beaten for the gospel. He had been imprisoned for the gospel. And all those along the way who have partnered with him, of which Epaphroditus is now included, are a band of brothers, fellow soldiers. The picture you get of Paul and those who were on the mission with him is that, under Jesus’ direction, they would have gone anywhere, done anything. In many ways, the ministry of the gospel and the mission goes forward similar to a military campaign with its strenuousness and need for close cooperation and collaboration.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Moises Silva, *Philippians*, p. 4.

<sup>3</sup> Fee, p. 276.

<sup>4</sup> Marshall, p. 71

- We are at war, right? Of course the battle being fought is not physical. We are not crusaders. The battle is spiritual. **Ephesians 6:12**, right? *For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.* Unlike radical Islam Christians don't blow people up or take up arms for Jesus. That's not the mission. The battle is a spiritual battle for the souls of men and women. The mission is a mission of love and service; of being compelled by love to take the good news of Christ crucified to people who do not yet know that news. That's a battle fought not with fists and guns but through the word of God and prayer and perseverance and trial and testing. But it is a battle nonetheless. You are at war whether you want to be in one or not. A war-time mentality is critical to success for everyone involved, both soldiers and civilians. Without it the mission is toast.
- Some of you may feel like you can't help with the mission Jesus launched. You know what? You can. Everybody plays a part. During World War 2 much has been written about war effort from home. **Rosie the Riveter**. Everybody does something. Save gas. Save rubber. Save metal. All for the war effort. [Slide #4] I love this World War 2 era poster from New York City. "Sew for Victory." Or this one. [Slide #5] "Plant a victory garden. Our food is fighting." And my personal favorite. [Slide #6] "Use it up. Wear it out. Make it do. Our labor and our goods are fighting." Some of us will more naturally be on the front lines of Jesus' mission. But everybody plays a part.
- Epaphroditus, *fellow soldier*, carried some notes and papers and some money from Philippi to Rome. Not a big deal, right? Wrong. He played a tremendously important role. Without his errand Paul doesn't get the money needed to sustain the mission.
- [Slide #7] The stakes of the mission are high in a couple of different ways. People's spiritual lives are at stake. You ought to be sold out for Jesus and the mission. Also, you do realize that Christ's return is dependent upon Jesus' followers carrying out the mission he entrusted to the church? Peter says in **Acts 3:19-20** *Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, 20 and that he may send the Christ, who has been appointed for you--even Jesus.* The return of Christ is dependent upon the church carrying out the mission entrusted to it by Jesus. Peter says something similar again in **2 Peter 3:11-12** that by the way we live we either speed up or slow down Christ's return. **The mission of the church dies without some serious risk taking.**
- What part are you playing? What's your role? Do you have a war-time mentality when it comes to the mission Jesus launched? The risk involved will look different for all of us. But everyone is needed. If you are not helping with the war effort, so to speak, you're hindering it. If your approach to the Christian life has this element of a war-time mentality chances are you'll be more mobilized for mission than if you see the Christian life as a lazy, Sunday afternoon, peace-time stroll through the park.

### Transition

Look at **verses 28-30**. Epaphroditus, now home after a tour of duty, deserves a hero's welcome by the Philippian church. Why? [Slide #8] Because of his **willingness to lay down one's life for Christ**, which is the **second characteristic** of those who are aren't afraid of risk and are therefore mobilized for mission.

- Listen. <sup>28</sup>Therefore, Paul says, *I am all the more eager to send him, so that when you see him again you may be glad and I may have less anxiety.* <sup>29</sup>Welcome him in the Lord with great joy, and honor men like him, <sup>30</sup>because he almost died for the work of Christ, risking his life to make up for the help you could not give me.
- **Jim Elliot**, the martyred missionary to Ecuador, remember his words? “He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.” Paul urges a hero’s welcome for Epaphroditus for one reason. He risked his life; he almost died for the work of Christ.
- Paul draws a direct line between Epaphroditus’ near fatal illness and his service for Christ. They’re tied together. *Welcome him in the Lord with great joy, and honor men like him, <sup>30</sup>because he almost died for the work of Christ, risking his life to make up for the help you could not give me.*
- The word Paul uses to summarize Epaphroditus’ service? Risk. He risked his life. It’s a gambling word. Commentator **Ralph Martin** says, “Such a word brings its own challenge and rebuke to an easy-going Christianity which makes no stern demands, and calls for no limits of self-denying, self-effacing sacrifice. Here is a man [meaning Epaphroditus] who gave little thought to personal comfort and safety in order to discharge his responsibility.”<sup>5</sup> He hazarded his life.<sup>6</sup> He risked his life for the work of Christ.
- Epaphroditus never even starts the journey for Rome without a willingness to risk something for Jesus and the mission. He never sets foot on the **Egnatian Way**, the main road from Philippi to Rome, without a willingness to put his life on the line for the sake of the mission. **The mission of the church dies without some serious risk-taking.**
- I am not saying we go out and become martyrs for Christ and the gospel. I’m not saying that. What I’m saying, what we see in Epaphroditus is what **Deitrich Bonhoeffer** said in *The Cost of Discipleship*. “The cross is laid on every Christian... When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die.”<sup>7</sup> We die to self. We die to sin. We die to our desires and our plans for our life so that Jesus’ plans and Jesus’ desires for us might live.
- What I am saying is that we love and cherish Christ so much that we willingly offer all of who we are to him. And that means a willingness to lay down our life for Christ—in all of the multifaceted ways in which a person can lay down their life and serve the cause, the mission of Christ. If you are a Christian believer Jesus already owns you anyway. **1** **Corinthians 6:20** *you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.*
- Paul’s teaching here is consistent with Jesus’ words who said that the greatest honor among his followers belongs to those who render the lowliest service which is why Epaphroditus is to be honored.<sup>8</sup>
- **[Slide #9]** We take risks when it comes to business ventures. We take dietary risks—like the minor league ball team in Michigan that’s offering a 4,800 calorie, 4-pound, five beef patty burger.<sup>9</sup> We take relational risks like marrying another person. We take on the risk of a

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<sup>5</sup> Martin, p. 137-8.

<sup>6</sup> O’Brien, p. 343.

<sup>7</sup> Bonhoeffer, Dietrich. *The Cost of Discipleship*, Macmillan Publishing, NY 1937, page 7.

<sup>8</sup> O’Brien, p. 341.

<sup>9</sup> © 2008 *The Associated Press*, 2009.

<sup>9</sup> Moises Silva, *Philippians*, p. 4.

mortgage. We love games of risk and chance. Why are we not more willing to take kingdom risks? Mission related risks? Personal risks because of our love for Christ and for his people?

### **Conclusion**

- One of my favorite verses in the Bible is **Romans 2:7**. Listen to what it says. **Romans 2:7**. *To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, he [meaning God] will give eternal life.* I don't know about you, but to me that picture of the Christian life requires some element of risk. *To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, he will give eternal life.*