

Philippians #5
Destroying the Hermeneutic of Suspicion
Phil 2:19-30

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Oct. 20, 2024

Philippians Chapter 1 talks about suffering, suffering for Christ. Chapter 2 is about the IFs...so the summary of 1 and 2 is that suffering will happen and when you are suffering, connect to Jesus: Do Phil 2:3-4:

Phil 2:3 Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, **4** not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.

Selfish ambition and vain conceit are pretty easy to define and identify; we are to value humility (consider; also means leadership: to lead). This is actually a combination of valuing someone so much as to aid them. We have values at the Village: it means we think something is really important. In a sense, we are putting the interests of others above ourselves. The Western world has put this verse at its core: when this is practiced, things work! Think about marriage, parenting, friendships. Success happens when you put someone else's interest above your own. THIS IS VERY HARD! Historically, we've tried to hold onto this but in 1942 (WW II), there was a shift in society in which we thought we needed to prioritize protecting our own. Out of this, the *Hermeneutic of Suspicion* arose.

A Hermeneutic of Suspicion

Hermeneutic – A method of interpretation

Hermeneutic of Suspicion – Approaching the object studied with skepticism rather than at face value

What it looks like: Viewing oneself as an outsider instead of an insider.

We have been swimming in a world of hermeneutics of suspicion: seeing myself as the outsider rather than the insider. If I go to the doctor and see myself as an outsider, I might think he is pressing a larger agenda on me. Some of you might be better at discarding this but we all swim in it. For example, we were playing a video game that was “roguelike.” Our daughter knew what this was and I didn't: therefore, I suspected she didn't know

what she was talking about. In 2005, I did a whole sermon about this. In 2010 depression and suicide spiked because of:

Social Media Landscape 2023



We now have algorithms built around us... this isolates us and makes us depressed and suspicious of people. We can't take things at face-value. This has infected and permeated us and has destroyed relationships. The people behind this make money off of this: even if we try to resist it, we are all a part of it.

Hope, Solidarity, & Service

Define Christ-like Community and Mission
Philippians 2:19-30

These three things counter a hermeneutic of suspicion. When we serve together, we are able to point in the right direction. The text today is helpful for us as we walk through this.

Philippians 2:19-30

19 I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, that I also may be cheered when I receive news about you.

Paul narrates things in a certain way: he is clear in his hope that he is submitted to the Lord.

20 I have no one else like him, who will show genuine concern for your welfare. **21** For everyone looks out for their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ.

There are over 8 billion people on this planet: the Hermeneutic of Suspicion is palpable. Yet, even back in Paul's time, this was happening. Paul points out that everyone had other focuses which cause stress for him. People were out for themselves; only Timothy stood out.

22 But you know that Timothy has proved himself, because as a son with his father he has served with me in the work of the gospel.

There is a family-like intimacy with Paul and Timothy.

23 I hope, therefore, to send him as soon as I see how things go with me. **24** And I am confident in the Lord that I myself will come soon.

There are only two options for Paul: he will be released or else be killed. Timothy will come either way. Yet Paul is confident that things will work and yet he could still be in submission to the will of God.

25 But I think it is necessary to send back to you Epaphroditus, my brother, co-worker and fellow soldier, who is also your messenger, whom you sent to take care of my needs. **26** For he longs for all of you and is distressed because you heard he was ill. **27** 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.

Read between the lines to see what is happening: Paul is being cared for by Epaphroditus who becomes sick. Yet he narrates things differently: he submits himself to the will and mercy of God for the Philippians to not be worried in the midst of suffering.

28 Therefore 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.

Paul needs to send Epaphroditus back so he is not anxious. This is a very honest letter and you can tell that Paul deeply cares about the people he is writing to.

29 So then, welcome him in the Lord with great joy, and honor people like him, **30** because he almost died for the work of Christ. He risked his life to make up for the help you yourselves could not give me.

Maybe Epaphroditus would have shame in coming back but Paul depicts him as a servant. This is an example of how we should honor and imitate those who serve us.

Besides Jesus, there are three characters in this passage.

Timothy:

- Genuinely cares for others' welfare (v. 20)
- Selfless in his focus on Christ's interests (v. 21)
- Proven character (v. 22)
- Faithful servant of the gospel (v. 22)

The infographic features a black background with white text and icons. The name 'Timothy:' is written in white. To the right, four light gray boxes contain icons and text: a hand holding a leaf for 'Genuinely cares for others' welfare (v. 20)', a cross for 'Selfless in his focus on Christ's interests (v. 21)', a blue flame for 'Proven character (v. 22)', and a purple heart for 'Faithful servant of the gospel (v. 22)'.

Do you know anyone like this? Who are you Timothy to? Is there someone you can follow who is doing this?

Timothy has Paul's mission and values and welfare as his own.

Epaphroditus:

- Brother, coworker, and fellow soldier (v. 25)
- Messenger and minister to Paul's needs (v. 25)
- Deep concern for others (v. 26)
- Willing to risk his life for the gospel (v. 30)
- Faithful worker in the Lord (v. 30)

The infographic features a black background with white text and icons. The name 'Epaphroditus:' is written in white. To the right, five colored boxes contain text: a purple box for 'Brother, coworker, and fellow soldier (v. 25)', a blue box for 'Messenger and minister to Paul's needs (v. 25)', a dark blue box for 'Deep concern for others (v. 26)', a green box for 'Willing to risk his life for the gospel (v. 30)', and a light green box for 'Faithful worker in the Lord (v. 30)'.

Do you know anyone like this? Would you like to be like him? What do you notice about him.



Paul narrates things about his life in a way that builds up people and gives them mission. He serves and sacrifices and finds joy in the work of Christ. Even though he is struggling the most, he is deeply concerned about others. Do you know any Paul? Would you like to be like Paul?

Whenever Paul talks, he's talking about the Gospel in the context of what God is doing. He gives hope and demonstrates solidarity, for example in the way he describes a person as FAMILY. This bonding helps us understand who we are. He is selfless.



1. Dependence on the Lord's Will (Hope)

- 1. 19 I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon

2. Family, Partner, and Warrior (Solidarity)

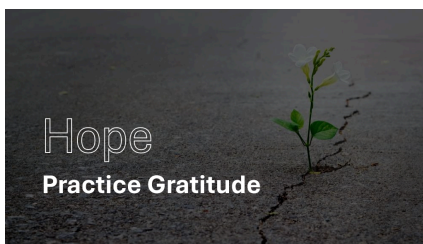
- 1. 25 But I think it is necessary to send back to you Epaphroditus, my brother, co-worker and fellow soldier, who is also your messenger, whom you sent to take care of my needs.

3. Selfless in his focus on Christ's interests (Service)

- 1. 20 I have no one else like him, who will show genuine concern for your welfare. 21 For everyone looks out for their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ.

The invitation is to lay our lives down and not operate with a herm of suspicion that thinks the other person has another motive.

Applications:



Practice thanking people for things in robust ways: When you thank in this way, it puts your mind in a good place and helps build up others. When people thank you for something, it gives HOPE! Focus on thanking people for the ways they imitate Jesus.

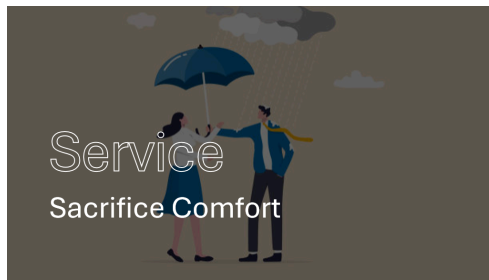


I have three suggestions to increase solidarity which builds genuines relationships:

1. Stop googling as your first option. If you know a car mechanic, call them before you google. If you can't understand a math problem, call someone who knows math. ***Aim for human interaction before you ask a computer.*** This is a way of showing others they are important and have something to offer.

2. Go out to coffee: have eye-to-eye conversations about everything. Talk about politics eye-to-eye and listen to the other person. Questions to ask: Do I treat this person with suspicion? Where am I in this? Also, start asking whose interest am I after: mine or Jesus's? How will it look different to have Jesus's interests?

3. Put your phone away and stop looking at it (people can and will find you!). See how you experience relationships when you do this!



\ **Service gets us out of our comforts:** When you serve someone, it requires that you be uncomfortable. This is what service looks like. Go to one another and ask how you can serve them, no holds barred, even if it feels like you will be obligated. You are free to say you cannot do something.

I think we can put away the Hermeneutic of Suspicion if we put on hope, solidarity, and service.

