

LIVES MATTER, PHIL2:19-30

Letters from Prison #5

◆**Intro:** How much do you know about this character, Paul, the writer whose letter we are reading? He was a courageous pioneer, a fearless apologist, and challenging teacher, a tireless traveler, a gutsy evangelist. All these describe the Apostle Paul. He was one of those super talented folks that most of us don't really know. The ones who sell books and talk at conferences and post cast. But do any of us know them personally? But in this little section of Paul's letter we see another characteristic: friend. Paul's letters, when read slowly enough, reveal a vast matrix of friendships. Roman's 16, for example, lists over thirty individuals by name. And did you notice phrases that characterize friendships in our text?

◆v19 Paul is eager to receive *news about you*.

◆v20 Timothy has a *genuine interest in your welfare*

◆v26 Epaphroditus *longs for all of you, and was distressed* that they found out he was ill.

◆v28 Paul is *anxious* about their worry.

◆v30 Eppy *risked his life* to help Paul.

◆Lets go back over what was happening here. Paul was in prison. Roman prisons didn't supply you with TV, and a library so you could learn to be a lawyer. They didn't even provide your necessities. If people who knew you didn't come and give, and help, you just suffered. So the Philippian church sent Epaphroditus with a gift for Paul. Now he didn't call an Uber or a taxi. Most likely he just plain walked and sailed 800 miles. What

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is plain is that these people cared about each other. Would you even drive 800 miles to bring some clothes, food, money to someone? What we see happening is a demonstration of what Paul has been teaching. In chapter 2 he said

◆“Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.” Philippians 2:4, NIV.

◆And that’s exactly what he, and Timothy (v21) and Epaphroditus were doing. They were being true friends. I read a **study** of a thousand homes looking for the top needs in the community. The number one answer? Friends. Close proximity doesn’t necessarily produce friendships. You can live next to people for years and never meet them! But building people up and becoming friends leads to greater joy. We’re going to make some observations about the text and apply them to two areas today, Dad’s (because its father’s day) and the job-site (because aside from the family, the people we spend the most time with is those we work with.) The home can produce joy or drain it. And the work place can produce joy or drain it. Lets dig in. Here are a number of ways to produce joy at home and at work.

◆**1. Genuine interest in others**

◆In verse 4 Paul urged us to be like Christ; to look to the interests of others. That is, wonder about them. Care about them. Think about them. When someone is agitated and making a bit of a scene, you can react to the scene with anger. You can get loud yourself. You can fight back. Or you could wonder

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what's going on inside them. You could care that their emotional state is tough, and that all must not be well. That will eventually lead to practical opportunity to ask, or to offer help.

◆ This is a producer of joy. As long as we are living every day just for ourselves, you can be sure your joy will suffer. I know it's counter intuitive, but it's a spiritual law. Jesus said,

◆ *"For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it." Luke 9:24, NIV.*

◆ In verse 20 Paul observes that this is who Timothy is, taking genuine interest in the Philippian church as compared to the other church people who don't! That's a bit of a surprise too, isn't it? Among the Christians Paul is working with, a whole lot of them are really only interested in their own thing! Even with Paul as their pastor, they were not fully devoted followers of Jesus as yet. Makes you wonder about us too, doesn't it. Know any Christians like that?

◆ **A.** Now let's apply it to Dads. Dads, know what makes for healthy kids? It's not food and nice clothes. What children need is to know they are important to you. Clothes, and phones, and toys, and money, and even saying I love you at the end of a phone call –these don't really convince the heart. But genuine interest does. You can learn this. Ask your son to tell you about his day. (You probably have to press and pull a few teeth, but ...) Learn the names of his friends. My father-in-law amazed me like this. He knew our friends names. He greeted them by name

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when they came to town. He asked about their families, and jobs which he remembered data about. When he said he prayed for me each day, I never doubted it, because I experienced his genuine interest in our family. We lived in IA for a decade. They lived in Chicago. Every couple of months, he and grandma would drive 10 hours just to see us for a few days.

◆**B.** Let's apply it to the office, or the work-site. As a believer in Jesus, you are not in your place of work merely to draw a paycheck. If God has put you there, you are his embassy there. His lamp post. His emissary. Jesus wants you to bring his good Kingdom into the lives of the people you work with. You are his minister to the gal in the next cubical, or the fella at the next station. Ask, "God, how can I show genuine interest in the life to my co-worker?" See, people are interesting creatures. We need more than food and shelter. Everyone of us longs for love. Touch someone around you each day with love.

◆**C.** Just a bit more about this genuine interest. One writer calls it "the discipline of mindful availability". It's more than just giving someone your full attention, although this is maybe step one on the way. It's being present. For example, you're talking at the dinner table and your wife stops and says, "Let me know when you're home." (Why does she say that? I was even repeating her words back to her.) It's because she can tell my ears are hearing her but my mind isn't. Guess what, your children can tell when that's happening too. Don't do it, Dad.

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◆**D.** Why do we want to enter into someone else's life with genuine interest? Well, not only did Jesus do it for us, and command us to imitate him, but because every human being is made in the image of God. Doesn't matter their level of education, the city or the jungle they live in, their modern or ancient view points, the color of their skin, or even whether they are good people or not. Every human being is an image-bearer of God himself. That my friends is the reason for caring about others. When we care for a human we are indirectly worshiping God himself whose image they bear.

◆**2. Help others**

◆One of the surest ways feel joy, is to put yourself aside for someone else's sake. This is simply the practice of demonstrating compassion and genuine interest. When you work at bringing joy to others, you get joy yourself as a by-product! This is what's happening for Paul, and Tim and Eppy and the church in Philippi as well. They sent gifts to Paul in prison. Paul is sending these really productive fellows back to them.

◆**A.** So Dad, I know you're tired when you get home. You and everyone else in the whole wide world. Genuine interest in others does not turn off helping when it's inconvenient. Which store do you tend to like more? The one where you ask where the shoe laces are and the attendant says "Aisle 7", or the one where the attendant puts down her clip board and says, "It's aisle 7 right over there. Let me show you." and walks you right up to that

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glorious rack of expertly manufactured string. What did they give you? Their presence. Helping someone demonstrates genuine interest by giving your presence to the other person.

◆ Can you make your work place like that? Of course. You can be the kind of employee that stops and goes out of the way for another person. You can be the kind of Dad who thinks your son is more important than watching the game. Or who tries to figure out their math problem even though a lot of history has come and gone since you were a Fifth Grader!

◆ Sometimes just showing up at something is helping others. People who do that are joy bringers. They could say all the things others say: I work hard all week. I like my weekends free. Sorry, can't make it. I'm under a lot of stress right now, I can't. I deal with problems all day. So when I come home I'm not gonna... Listen, if you are too busy with your own agenda to help, to give your presence to others, you're too busy. Slow down. Do less. Leave margin for the unexpected need.

◆ **3. Give a blessing**

◆ In verse 29-30 Paul is encouraging the church to honor Epaphroditus and welcome him home. He almost died after all. Everyone needs encouragement and appreciation. It energizes us and brings joy. Think about it. When you are pointing out the value of someone you are being joyful about them, right? Blessing people brings joy!

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- ◆ The **Wall Street Journal** reports that being appreciated is one of the great motivators on the job, even better than money. Researchers at the London School of Economics analyzed more than 50 studies that looked at what gets people charged up at work. They concluded that we give our best effort if the work gets us interested and excited, if we feel that it's providing meaning and purpose, and if others appreciate what we're doing.
- ◆ Two business professors **designed a study** in which they asked professionals to advise students about the cover letters they were using to apply for jobs. After receiving the suggestions, the students asked for help with another letter. Some 32 percent of the professionals agreed. But when students added a single line to their note about the first feedback—"Thank you so much! I am really grateful!"—a full 66 percent of the advisers agreed to help again. A simple expression of gratitude doubled the response.
- ◆ **Bill Glass**, who works with kids in prison, writes, "What is our country's biggest problem? A lack of a father's blessing. The FBI studied the 17 kids who shot their classmates in towns like Paducah, Kentucky; Pearl, Mississippi; and Littleton, Colorado. All 17 shooters had only one thing in common: they had a father problem. I see it so much; it's just unbelievable. There's something about it when a man doesn't get along with his father.

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It makes him mean; it makes him dangerous; it makes him angry.”

◆**B.** So what does giving a blessing look like? Well, as we just saw, in the workplace simple gratitude blesses others. Affirming them, and not just the job or accomplishment, but them as a person -produces joy. Blessing is a bit more than praise; it is recognizing the good, the belovedness in a person and naming it.

In the home Dads have a special power in giving blessings to the children that few realize. It can transform a person.

◆**C.** On the other side of it, failure to bless amounts to a curse. Declining to affirm amounts to discouragement because we are all weak, doubting, longing, needing creatures. The concert is over, **Billy** joins the family from the band room, they talk about going out for ice cream on the way home. Dad asks who the tall kid Billy was talking to was. (Good: genuine interest.) But what’s missing son far? What does every child in band want to know? “Did you see me? Could you hear me playing? Did you like it? Were you proud? If Dad never says anything, it’s like a curse. It’s a failure to affirm, and that weakens a person, because we already all doubt ourselves.

◆Some men say, “Well, I’m just not comfortable with all that kind of stuff.” That’s not the point. It’s not about your comfort. It’s about your child’s spiritual health, and down the line, the society she lives in, and whether or not he shoots his classmates, or destroys an innocent person’s bakery in a riot, or hurts a

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policeman whose trying to keep people safe. Blessing others is a sacred business because people are sacred. They bear the image of God.

◆**Conclusion:** People matter. All lives matter. You can see that in and in-between the lines of the Scriptures. The people in your house, the people at work -these are what matter. When we live that way, we find much more joy. Isn't that what our Lord showed us? Hebrews 12 says "for the joy set before him...he endured the cross.

◆"It's is a serious thing to live in a society of possible gods and goddesses, to remember that the dullest and most uninteresting person you can talk to may one day be a creature which, if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship. .. There are no ordinary people. You have never talked to a mere mortal. Nations, cultures, arts, civilizations - these are mortal and their life is to ours as the life of a gnat. But it is immortals whom we joke with, work with, marry, snub, and exploit... Next to the Blessed Sacrament itself, your neighbor is the holiest object presented to your senses." Lewis.