

I'm a bit torn, about how to approach the message today. It's the sort of passage that we wouldn't usually spend a whole lot of time on... And until I had to study it for today's message, it's the sort of passage that I'd read and go "*Yeah, just a couple of paragraphs, describing some comings and goings – and a bit of personal stuff – Not much to learn here*".....

But as I read it more deeply, and prayed, and dwelled on God's word, I found myself in a bit of a dilemma. You see, this reading today, gives us an opportunity for us talk about those who are being called to ministry. And yes, I know we're **all** called to ministry, but we're all called to ministry in different ways. And as Paul talks about Timothy and Epaphroditus, we realise that these blokes are serving in ministry in a way **we** would often associate with a missionary/minister/pastor/leader of a church...

And I believe there are those who are listening to this today, who the Lord is going to challenge and be calling 'to step up' – because the Lord is calling you to serve and to minister, in a way greater than you currently are...

But that leaves me with a bit of a problem, because now that I've told you this, most of you are going to go "Oh, that's for those other people".... And you might be inclined to stop paying attention...

But I don't want you to stop paying attention, because there's some really important stuff here, for **all of us** to learn.

Let's begin with prayer:

Heavenly Father,
as we study Your word today,
we want to begin, by surrendering our whole
selves, to You.

Lord, by Your Holy Spirit,
speak to us this day.
Speak to us as a church,
and speak to each of us, individually.

And Lord,
because You have saved us,
and because You **are** Lord,
because You call us to live in a manner
worthy of the Lord Jesus Christ,
And because you call us to obedience,,,

Lord, my answer to You, is already “Yes Lord, I
will” …

And so Lord, as you speak to me today,
And as you challenge me today,
my answer is “Yes”.

Even now, before I hear You, my answer is “Yes”.

“Yes, I will go where you call me to go.
Yes, I will serve as you call me to serve.”
Yes, I will give up, what you tell me to leave behind.

And so, Lord, by Your Holy Spirit,
speak to me today, so that I can obey…
In Jesus' Name,

Amen.

That sort of prayer, is what I call “a ‘making it real’ prayer”...

God will call each of us, to serve Him in different ways... But there is one phrase that can never be uttered by a disciple of Jesus, and that is “No, Lord.”

We **are** able to say

- “Yes, Lord”.
- “Help me, Lord”
- “No” to God....

But we **cannot** say “No, Lord.” Because if Jesus Christ is truly “My Lord”, I cannot say “No”.... Because, that’s what the title “Lord” means. He is my boss/master/ the one I **cannot** say “no” to...

And that’s why I call that sort of prayer, “A Makin’ it real prayer”.

Because Jesus is my Lord, my answer is already yes, And so when we know the Lord is speaking / giving us a direction, we don’t have to go away and think about it, because we’ve already said “Yes”.

Righto, so:

We’re in a section of the letter, which is probably best summed up by

Philippians 1:27 (ESV) ²⁷ ... let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel,

And in 2:4, He says to the Philippian church, ⁴ Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others.

And today, Paul gives us some personal examples of disciples of Jesus, who are doing this very thing – living in a manner, worthy of the gospel of Christ & standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel.

And they're not just looking out for their own interests – they're looking out for the interests of others.

And so, today we encounter 2 servants of Jesus:

- Timothy (who was a long-term partner with Paul in his missionary and ministry work);
- Epaphroditus (who himself comes from Philippi), and this is the only place, in the whole Bible, where Epaphroditus gets a mention.

So, the first point for today, is “Ministry is shared”.

When we first started Bush Disciples – Planting a church is tough... If you look at most church planting models, it sort of follows a business model:

- Identify a place (usually with a large population);
- Often with lots of professional type people

And that's why church planting is really popular in the cities & up the coast (big population & lots of professional people);

- You gather a team about you – people who can do stuff (musicians; leaders; people gifted in kids & youth ministry)
- Organise financial support to get you started
- Away you go....

But when we started Bush Disciples, we didn't do any of that, otherwise BD wouldn't have started... Who plants a whole bunch of churches, in the bush??? And without lining up funding, and without "a team" (as such)...

And so, we made a start, but God intends ministry to be shared... And God put it on people's hearts... And a team began to gather:

- Musicians;
- People who could teach;
- People who supported us financially;
- People who were good with kids...

Ministry, is meant to be shared...

It's been wonderful (over these last few months), because ministry has been getting shared with the folk at Bongeene. And hasn't that been great... A number of people have said to

me (from Bongeem & St George & even from Richmond [outskirts of Sydney]) It's been so good to start to get to know all these different people...

Do you know what's been happening??? Ministry is being shared...

But even so, (I have to confess that) as a Pastor in a little country church, I sometimes get a bit jealous of the multitudes of people big churches in the city have to draw on... But even so, God in His own way, provides who we need, to carry out the mission He's given to us...

Righto, so ministry is meant to be shared. And Timothy is somebody who shared in ministry with Paul.

Timothy was someone, who Paul knew he could rely on, and he could send him out as his representative to other churches (when he wasn't able to get there himself).

And this is how Paul describes Timothy:

- I have no one like him
- He knows that Timothy genuinely cares for the people who make up the church in Philippi;
- Timothy has proven his worth – he's been a faithful worker;
- And Paul and Timothy have worked together as a team – Paul was older / Timothy younger, and so he says it's like a father & son team, working together

Anyway, Paul is really wanting to send Timothy to the church in Philippi (to check on them, spend a bit of time with them, and bring word back to Paul about how they're going).

But he just couldn't do that at the moment. And this is a difficult dilemma for a pastor of a church – To know when to hold on to someone because they're so valuable in that church, and to know when to release them, to go out and do ministry elsewhere... It's a really tough call...

And at times, Paul **would** send Timothy out... But he just couldn't do that (at this point). Do you know why??? Because Timothy was the only one... He was the only one who genuinely cared for the Philippians. And he was probably the only one that Paul knew he could rely on...

You see, it seems like the local church where Paul was, wasn't in very good shape.

We're not 100% sure, of Paul's location when he wrote this. We know he was in prison, but we're not sure which one... The traditional understanding, is that he was in Rome, and that is the most likely spot. But it is possible, he was in Ephesus...

But regardless of his location, the local church there, wasn't in good shape. He's already talked about how some people there preach the gospel out of rivalry, hoping to rub it in to Paul, "Look, we can preach too". (Who does that???)

And there's n o o n e e l s e t h e r e, that Paul can depend on. Nobody else there, cared about Philippi – they only cared about their own little patch. In fact, it's worse than that – they only cared about themselves... He said:

²¹ For they all seek their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ.

I fear that it's way too easy for us, to fall into the rut of being be a people who care only about our own interests, rather than caring about the interests of Jesus Christ... And when that happens, a church doesn't have the manpower it needs – it's like *“If the church is a body, we've got one leg, one arm, and no toes”* – *much of the body is missing from action...*

Somebody once said:

Many churches are like a football game: a few people on the field (in desperate need of a rest), and a heap of people in the grandstands (in desperate need of exercise).

And V21 hits hard... **²¹ For they all seek their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ.** What a terrible indictment on a church ...

And it forces us, to ask the question of ourselves, “Who am I living for???” Seriously:

- What's our priorities???
- When it comes to serving, who do I serve most???
Jesus??? Or myself???
- Am I seeking to pursue the Lord's **commission**?
- Or am I seeking to fulfil my own **ambition**?

- When it comes to time, do I even **have** time to serve Jesus?
- Or have I filled up my calendar so full (with things that represent my own interests), that I just don't have any time left for Jesus????

And for some of us today, the Lord might be saying, "That's you". And He's challenging us, to sacrifice our own interests, and to begin to prioritise the interests of Jesus Christ...

And for some of you, the Lord might be calling you to become like Timothy – to be:

- someone who is available; and
- trustworthy;
- to be sent on mission;
- to visit churches who need encouragement;
- encourage them in the faith
- preach & teach
- to be available to support another pastor (like young Timothy supported Paul)

But the thing is, as a church, we might be stifling the calling of a Timothy.

We might **have** someone like Timothy (here in our midst) – someone that God is calling, to go into ministry, but we can't spare him... Let's not be a church who stifles the call of a Timothy (because we haven't got the interests of Jesus at heart)... Let's start caring less about our own interests, and 'step up', to care more about the interests of Jesus Christ...

Let's move on: The 2nd example is Epaphroditus. What do we know about Epaphroditus?

Well, the church in Philippi, sent Epaphroditus to minister to Paul, who was in jail – isn't that lovely.... Paul was in need, in jail. And they sent Epaphroditus (with a gift), to help meet those needs... But he became desperately sick. In fact, he was 'at death's door' – he almost died. But God had mercy on him, and he lived...

Anyway, Paul is going to send Epaphroditus back to Philippi, carrying this letter – why? Because they'd heard that he was crook & they were worried about him, and Paul's mind will be at ease, if he can show them that, "Hey, he's OK"...

But more importantly, how does Paul describe Epaphroditus?

- My brother;
- My fellow worker;
- My fellow soldier
- Your messenger
- Your minister to my need.

That's a pretty good reference, hey???

Both Timothy and Epaphroditus, are examples of disciples of Jesus, who didn't only look after their own interests. They were wanting to serve the interests of Jesus Christ. And they saw a need that Paul had, and they partnered with Paul in his ministry, in ways that cost them greatly... Epaphroditus almost died – that was the cost of him leaving his home (and presumably his job), to go and minister to Paul's need...

You see, even Paul (one of the greatest Apostles) couldn't do it alone – he needed partners in ministry.

And so he calls Epaphroditus “My brother” “My fellow worker”...

Ministry can be very lonely. It can be really hard... But when ministry is shared, it's a wonderful blessing. Now, there are people all over Australia (actually all over the world), who are listening to this today... And so I realise I'm not just talking to my own local congregation. And I want to encourage you, whoever your pastor or minister is, don't let them be somebody who feels like they're alone...

Be a brother/sister to your pastor. Sadly, sometimes ministry gets seen as a profession, and so sometimes in a church, the pastor is seen as a professional rather than as a brother in Christ. And I want to encourage you, to **be** a brother/sister to your pastor. Walk with him, as you follow Christ together. Share **his** burdens, as he shares your burdens.

And be a **fellow worker** with your pastor....
Who does the work in your church???

There's 3 common situations that can arise within a church:

1. The first is where the minister is seen as “the employee” , where the minister is paid to get stuff done... In some cases it's a formal expectation. In other cases, it just happens by default, because when there's work that needs to be done,

nobody volunteers, or when people **are** asked, “No, I’m too busy”, and so it becomes easier for the pastor/minister to just do it himself...

2. The second situation that can be found within a church, is pretty much the opposite.

It’s where the minister/pastor is seen as “the CEO”/manager. Or perhaps that might be the way the pastor/minister sees himself. But in a situation like this, you’ll often find the pastor/minister just has a few special pet jobs that he likes doing, and the rest of the time he directs.

3. But the third situation, is the way I believe it’s supposed to be...

When I first graduated from Bible college, and arrived at my first placement as a minister, I went to a church that hadn’t had a minister for a while. And it was in one of the first worship services, where one of the leaders gave an analogy of the church as a ship. And he said “We’ve been like a ship without a captain for a while, but now we’ve got a captain to give us some direction.”

And I said, “I’d rather look at it this way: The ship’s captain is God. I see myself as the ship’s cook – As part of the crew, my job is to keep the crew fed.”

You see, in the church, we are supposed to be “fellow workers” – all of us, working together to the glory of God.

Alright, so Epaphroditus was a fellow brother; a fellow worker; And also, “My fellow soldier”...

It’s not very politically correct (these days), to use military terminology in church... In fact, some preachers are pacifists, and they are so against all things military, that they remove all military terminology from their vocabulary – they find it abhorrent...

But as disciples of Jesus, we are in a war... Battle between:

- Good and evil
- Darkness and light
- The Lord our God & His Holy Angels and Satan & his demons

And as such, military terminology is entirely appropriate. We are soldiers... And yes, the safest place for a soldier, might be “well away from the battle-front”, and that’s the default position for a lot of Christians – we just want to stay in our own little ‘holy huddle’, and never take an active part in the advancement of the gospel...

But Paul sees himself and Epaphroditus as “fellow soldiers”...

As disciples of Jesus, we have our marching orders – take the life-giving gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, out into the world...

But, are we obeying those marching orders?

You see, if Jesus is our Commanding Officer (actually Commander in Chief), we have to be obeying His orders...

Now, I want you to note here: Paul (even as an Apostle), **he's** not the CO – even the great Apostle Paul, is a fellow soldier... And so, don't ever see your pastor/minister as the CO – he's not. And don't see him as the master strategist. He's not. View him, as your fellow soldier, and more importantly, **you be** a fellow soldier with the Pastor/Minister... Be there, right in the thick of the spiritual battle with him... And have his back...

So, that's what Epaphroditus was to Paul. But what was he to his home church (in Philippi)?

Well, he was **their** messenger, and **their** minister to Paul's need...

Messengers and ministers, are sent out by a church...

A local church identify (amongst its members), those whom God is calling, to be messengers and ministers... And they send them out, **not** to go and be a 'lone-ranger'... But to be 'boots-on-the-ground' (as it were), and to minister on behalf of that church (in the Name of Jesus)...

And no matter whether our church is a big church (or a small church), don't you think it's rather important:

- that **we** are ready to send out those who are like Timothy; and

- send out those who are like Epaphroditus; and
- that we would support them as they serve in ministry in the Name of Jesus...

We all have a role in this... We won't all get sent out as ministers, like Timothy and Epaphroditus did... But in V29, Paul tells us that we should honour such people...

If the Lord is calling you to be someone who is sent (to be a messenger; to be a minister), are you ready to go??? Are you willing, to be willing to go???

And to the rest of us, are we willing to send them? Are we willing to honour them & to support them? And are we willing to be active in local ministry ourselves, so that we can free-them-up to go???

I pray that we are.

Let's pray:

Lord, we prayed at the beginning, the answer is "Yes"..

When we hear your call to go in Your Name,
The answer is "Yes, Lord. I will".

When we see others answer the call to go in Your Name,

The answer is, "Yes, Lord. We will support them to do that".

And when we see a need (locally),
The answer is “Yes, Lord. I will serve”.

And so Lord, now open our eyes,
And open our ears to Your call.
Help us (in all things) to think less of our own
interests,
And to strive for Your interests.

In Jesus' Name,
Amen.