

June 25, 2017
Philippians (7): Kindred Spirits
Philippians 2:19-30
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Have you ever watched the movie *Cast Away*? In the film Tom Hanks plays the role of a man stranded on a remote island. As the days begin to drag by, he longs for companionship so much. When he happens to make his hand print on a volleyball, he develops it to draw a face and calls it Wilson. He spends four years talking to this volleyball friend. The night before he tries to leave the island on a raft, he lies down to sleep and asks, "Wilson, are you nervous? I'm nervous." Then he proceeds to converse with his friend about his fears. This film illustrated the truth that we need other people.

Loving relationships or loving friendships are valuable in our life. Paul mentioned in 1 Corinthians 13, saying "*These three remain: faith, hope, and love. But the GREATEST of these is love.*" (13) You can be successful in everything else in life, but if you don't have love, if you don't have people who you love and who love you right back, and if you don't have genuine friends, life is just not as good as it should be. We need one another. We are designed to enjoy relationships with others.

Paul also needed friends. In today's text Paul mentions about two persons, Timothy and Epaphroditus. I would like to point out three principles of friendship that they embodied. Let's see what we can learn from Paul's discussion of his two friends.

1. Paul experiences that truly friends have a kindred spirit. Paul and Timothy were very close. In verse 20 Paul refers to Timothy as "*a kindred spirit.*" Over the years, Paul discovered that Timothy would interpret situations much like he would. Whenever Paul wished for information from some church, or when he wished to send advice, counsel, encouragement, guidance, or rebuke, and when he could not go himself, he sent Timothy. Timothy delivered a message to the churches as if Paul had delivered it himself.

And Paul felt similarly about Epaphroditus. In verse 25 he referred to him as "*his brother, his fellow worker, and his fellow soldier.*" By using these word pictures to describe Epaphroditus, Paul was saying, "Our minds and our hearts are together. He wants what I want. He believes what I believe. We are united in faith." If you've ever had a friend like that, then you know how precious they are. These precious soul-mates read our motives and understand our needs.

2. Paul teaches that true friends are compassionate. Timothy and Epaphroditus are moved by the pain of others. In verse 20 Paul told the Philippians that Timothy was genuinely concerned about their welfare. In verse 26 he said that Epaphroditus was deeply distressed about the Philippian Christians, not wanting them to worry about his welfare. They were looking out for the interests of Jesus Christ.

Think about it. How long has it been since you were emotionally moved by the concern and anxiety that your friends or neighbors were experiencing? How long has it been since you cried over someone else's problems? We call people of Faith Church a church family. When you are ill or admitted in a hospital, who sends you a card or who prays for you? The persons next to you or in front of you or behind you are people who are ready to help you when you need any help. It is our blessing to have a loving community which supports, helps, and prays one for another.

3. Paul said true friends should be self-less and even sacrificial in the way they relate to others. Jesus said in John 15:13, "*Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friend.*" Epaphroditus very nearly did exactly that in coming to Rome. He came to Rome to take care of Paul day and night and then spent time sharing his faith with others or defending his faith. Then, finally, in pure exhaustion, with his resistance down, he became ill. It was serious. In verse 30 Paul said he was sick to the point of death. "*...he almost died for the work of Christ, risking his life to make up for the help.*" Danger and risk don't threaten true friendships. Rather they strengthen them. He sacrificed himself with no thought of reward.

Timothy and Epaphroditus were a blessing to Paul and to his own church. They together encourage us to submit ourselves to the Lord, and to one another, in the Spirit of Christ. In John 15:15 Jesus said that he is our true kindred spirit. He knows everything about us. He also cares about the tough times and heartaches that you go through in this life. He weeps when we suffer pain and rejoices when we rejoice. But most importantly He was our friend even to the point of a painful death. If you have never responded to His offer of friendship, then I encourage you to do so. It will change your life to have a friend like Him.

True friends have kindred spirit, they are compassionate, and they are sacrificial. We are blessed to have Jesus as our true friend. And Jesus wants us to love and to be a true friend to one another. Let us have a fun time together and let us share our burdens or sorrows together. And let us open our minds, hearts, and doors further for those who are in need beyond our church wall and around the world, so we can be a friend to them and share our kindred spirits with them.