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CHOOSE GREAT ASSOCIATES, BE A GREAT ASSOCIATE (Philippians 2:19-30)

The Bible gives us much wisdom regarding our associations.

Proverbs 12:26 - One who is righteous is a guide to his neighbor, but the way of the wicked leads them astray.

Proverbs 13:20 - Whoever walks with the wise becomes wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm.

Proverbs 14:7 - Leave the presence of a fool, for there you do not meet words of knowledge.

Proverbs 22:24-25 - Make no friendship with a man given to anger, nor go with a wrathful man, lest you learn his ways and entangle yourself in a snare.

1 Corinthians 15:33 - Do not be deceived: "Bad company ruins good morals."

In the final verses of Philippians 2, Paul introduces us to two men, commenting on their character and holding them up as examples of excellent associates we should seek and who we all would do well to emulate.

TIMOTHY – UNDISTRACTED FAITHFULNESS

Philippians 2:19-24 – I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, so that I too may be cheered by news of you. For I have no one like him, who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare. For they all seek their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. But you know Timothy's proven worth, how as a son with a father he has served with me in the gospel. I hope therefore to send him just as soon as I see how it will go with me, and I trust in the Lord that shortly I myself will come also.

Paul had a very special father/son relationship with Timothy, his protégé from Galatia (modern-day Turkey.) We know a good bit about Timothy because he was with Paul on a number of Paul's journeys. Also, since Paul wrote two letters directly to Timothy that are preserved for us in the New Testament, we get a

glimpse of his life and character in a deeper way than most other people mentioned in the Bible.

We know that Paul had great affection for Timothy and depended on him for help in the many demands of the ministry. He had such strong confidence in Timothy that he wanted to send him from Rome to the church in Philippi to get a report on how they were.

Paul had others in Rome who could have been sent, but he tells us why he hesitates to do that in these verses. Apparently, these "ministers" (who were also described in chapter one as those who preached out of "envy and strife. . . [and] selfish ambitions rather than pure motives") did not have the same heart for people as Timothy did.

As a matter of fact, Paul's reference to Timothy being his kindred spirit is a Greek word that literally means "equal souled". They were driven by the same thing: serving in the gospel.

Timothy also had a track record of faithfulness. Even though he had areas that needed work, such as his self-consciousness due to his youth, he worked hard to be a benefit to Paul in the work he was called to do. His "proven worth" had been shown time and again as he stuck with Paul, learning from him and developing into the spiritual son Paul could trust. Discipleship's goal is for the learner to become like the teacher.

So while Paul was under house arrest, he had a worthy, dependable friend to deliver his greetings and encourage the church in his place. Paul wanted to go, but wasn't sure what the future held for him.

Timothy's example also displays the importance of being a good follower. Before anyone is fit for leadership, they must first understand how to follow. Any decent public servant should experience this and have the same track record Timothy had, proving their worth in the patient days of quietly showing up

and proving dependability has been learned.

EPAPHRODITUS – UNDENIABLE FEARLESSNESS

*Philippians 2:25-30 - I have thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier, and your messenger and **minister to my need**, for he has been longing for you all and has been distressed because you heard that he was ill. Indeed he was ill, near to death. But God had mercy on him, and not only on him but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow. I am the more eager to send him, therefore, that you may rejoice at seeing him again, and that I may be less anxious. So receive him in the Lord with all joy, and honor such men, for **he nearly died for the work of Christ, risking his life** to complete what was lacking in your service to me.*

Epaphroditus had been sent to Paul's prison to deliver the gifts the Philippian church shared with him. This alone displays the confidence the church had in Epaphroditus and the true, solid character he possessed.

Paul had grown close to him as well. We don't know near as much about Epaphroditus as we do Timothy, but from this passage, we can deduce Paul's impression of him as a close associate to whom he owed much and had seen tremendous commitment.

Paul uses five terms to describe this man: brother, fellow worker, fellow soldier, messenger and minister to Paul's needs. The close camaraderie is unmistakable here in Paul's description.

It's clear from these verses that Epaphroditus was the kind of person who, when given a task, went all in. The conditions of travel in the first century were dangerous and brutal, but he accepted the risk to himself personally because his mission was so important. Paul would not be able to continue without care and supplies from his friends and Epaphroditus could not fail to deliver. This job required commitment and Epaphroditus was surely the right man to carry it out.

Apparently, he became seriously ill on this trip, to

the point of death. Everyone involved was deeply concerned for his health, so when he recovered, Paul knew it would be good for Epaphroditus to return to Philippi. The church would rejoice, Paul would feel relieved and Epaphroditus would enjoy the reunion with those who had worried about him so much.

But he finished his task, even though it had cost him dearly. Being this kind of friend and having this kind of tenacity in a friend is reassuringly valuable.

APPLICATION

Look back to the introduction on the previous page and read the five passages again, thinking about your role as a public servant.

Did you catch the implications for you in your situation? When we hear of corruption of someone in the political arena, it's never in a relational vacuum. There are always associates involved – staff, business contacts, confidants and counselors. How many destructive decisions could be avoided if we would only use biblical criteria when we choose our associates? How would we be more of a benefit to our friends if we gave more attention to the development of our own character?

Ben Franklin once said that we should choose friends very slowly, and change friends even slower. Paul's sleep was sweeter because he had Timothy and Epaphroditus in his life – men of character who were faithful and fearless. As you surround yourself with staff and counselors, take care to base your decisions on loyal, ethical and moral character.

At some point, you will be chosen as an associate as well. Be a person who takes these examples seriously, allowing God to mold you into the type of friend you would want to depend on in your important work.