

A Shared Service

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[0 : 00] Let's ask God for help. Father, we are thankful that you have saved us through Jesus, by your love and grace.

And you are still at work in us. So please help me to be faithful to your word. Please quieten our hearts and help us focus our minds that we may hear you clearly.

We depend on you completely, for apart from you, we can do nothing. Amen. Most of us are very comfortable hearing what Christ has done for us.

His grace, his sacrifice, our salvation in him, assurance of faith, our security in Christ, and so on. What about Christian service? I think most of us like the idea of serving Jesus. After all, he has done so much for us.

[1 : 06] But when we are asked to serve, some of us may hesitate. No, no, no. Not ready. Don't want.

Ask someone else, please. Familiar, right? Some think that service is something extra, optional, only if we have the time or energy or the right personality.

Others think that Christian service means only evangelism, preaching or going on missions. But Christian service is basically just using our talents and resources to serve others for Christ's sake. We can serve God in many ways. Yes, it does include ministries in the church like Sunday school, the EYM, ladies' group, music team, ushering team, the AV team, social concerns, or even the council.

But it can be as simple as arranging chairs, serving refreshments, welcoming a newcomer, practicing hospitality, or just walking a brother or a sister through a difficult period in their lives.

[2 : 35] But serving God is not confined to church matters. In your work, your schools, whatever NGOs you are in, your charitable organizations, in the marketplace, you can be serving God by being a Christian voice there.

In this passage today, Paul will show us that Christian service is actually a normal outworking of a life shaped by the gospel.

Part and parcel of working out our salvation in obedience and living out the mindset of Jesus. And Christian service is not a solo act, not even for Paul, and it involves other Christians.

Now, the Philippian church is a church that was striving together as one for the faith of the gospel, even as they faced opposition and suffering.

It was a church that loved Jesus, they loved the gospel, but is feeling the strain of life together. In the passage today, Paul will assure this church that they can be a united, humble, and obedient witness, shining like stars in the corrupt and twisted society they were in.

[4 : 06] He will show them that one, Christian service begins with God at work in them. Two, that they are to serve with a Christ-like attitude.

And three, even though Christian service can be costly, it is also joyful. And lastly, he will showcase two men, known to them as examples of faithful Christians whom they can emulate.

So let's dive in. Firstly, Christian service begins with God at work in us. You find that in verse 12 and 13. What do you tell a church that is already doing well?

The Philippian church has been obedient to the gospel since their conversion, when Paul, Silas, and Timothy, and others landed in Philippi, as recorded in Acts 16.

And Paul would probably have visited this church twice since then, in his journeys through Macedonia, and had witnessed firsthand their unfaltering obedience.

[5 : 26] But even more impressive, the reports that he received from others confirm their obedience, even when Paul was not with them.

What do you tell such a church? Can relax a bit, huh? No! That would be disastrous. Verse 12.

Paul's instruction to them was to continue. Jiayu! I hope that came out right. This banana very difficult.

Continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling. Now, this instruction is not just for the individual. It is for the church as a community.

Your salvation here is plural. We all work out our salvation together. Working out your salvation, we have heard this many times before, is not working for your salvation.

[6 : 33] Now, Paul is clear that salvation is by grace, through faith in Jesus Christ alone, and not accomplished by working for it. So, working out your salvation is simply to live out in a visible manner, the salvation God has already given you freely.

It is a visible result of the gospel shown through our actions, our thoughts, our attitudes, and our beliefs.

A life that more closely reflects Christ, including reflecting his mindset when we relate to one another, one that humbly considers the interests and the good of others before yourself.

And we are to do it with fear and trembling. Now, this is not a fear of losing your salvation, or the terror of judgment.

In Christ, we are completely saved. Rather, it means we are to work out our salvation with a deep reverence for Christ, and with an awe-filled seriousness before God.

[7 : 53] Not along-along. And in verse 13, it tells us that we can work out our salvation, because it is God who first works in us to will and to act.

Or in other words, in translations like the ESV and CSV, to will and to work, in order to fulfill his good purposes. Now, God gives us, God first gives us the will, the resolve, the desire, causing us to want to change, to want to give up sin, to want to act righteously, to want to follow Christ, to want to love others like Christ.

And then, he gives the strength and the ability to act, to work, to put into motion that desire, that desired action that he first put in us.

This is the work of the Holy Spirit. And if you are a Christian, you have the Holy Spirit. God said in Ezekiel 36, 27, that the Spirit will move you to follow his decrees and be careful to keep his laws.

We have no excuse. We are being disobedient when we say no to God's prompting. And God is so committed to our transformation to be more like Christ.

[9 : 34] So just as Christ was obedient even to the point of death, so we should be characterized by a life of obedience to God. So pray for it.

Ask God to align our desires to his, to give you the ability to act, to fulfill his good purposes in your life and in those around you.

Then you can truly live a life worthy of the gospel with the mindset of Christ. And we serve God, so we serve God because God is already at work in us.

So secondly, we are to serve with a Christ-like attitude. You find that in verse 13 to 16. How we serve matters as much as what we do.

Paul wrote in verse 14, Do everything without grumbling or arguing. What? Does it mean we cannot have different opinions or preferences or disagreements?

[10 : 50] Of course not. We will have different opinions and preferences and disagreements. We are only, we are all individuals wanting to serve God, but we may have our own thinking.

But it does mean that in our discussions and our deliberations, our words, our tone, our demeanor, our body language, must be loving, considerate, and tempered.

There should not be raised voices and angry words filled with rage, indecent language, unkind words, or worse, violence.

Instead, let the mindset of Christ characterize our interactions. In humility, value others above yourself.

Not looking to our own interests, but looking to the interests of the others. So, consider lovingly the opinions and the suggestions of others.

[12 : 04] Put forth gently, but maybe firmly, your opinion and suggestion. Pray together for a common plan of action guided by the gospel and other biblical principles.

After all, God is there working in each individual Christian to will and to act to fulfill his good purpose. But it does mean that after all is discussed and said, and a common decision has been agreed upon, then everyone should be on the same page as one voice.

There should be no grumbling or murmuring, whether verbally or in our hearts. We grumble because we still have the me first rather than the others first mindset when things don't go my way. It also means that when the going gets tough, when things are difficult in our service or when we are tested, we do not grumble or complain because that shows a distrust in God. Instead, we go to Christ to find help, comfort and a renewed strength. I remember an incident when I was a young Christian.

[13 : 36] I was in a car with a group of friends heading from PJ to Port Dixon for a church camp. I cannot remember what I was grumbling and complaining about.

But it must have been going on for a while in the car next to the driver and my friend, Hock Gi, who was driving, he turned to me and said, stop grumbling.

And I was immediately reminded of the story about the Israelites grumbling in the wilderness when things became difficult for them. They distrusted God and wanted to go back to Egypt.

Their behavior angered God. I immediately stopped my murmuring and later on in the camp, I thanked my friend for scolding me.

When you do everything without grumbling or arguing, it shows that you trust God. It shows that you are seriously working out your salvation, bearing the fruit of the gospel and reflecting the mindset of Christ more closely.

[14 : 48] And when you do this, Paul says in verse 15, you would be blameless and pure. Children of God without fault in a warped and crooked generation that is in the world that remains unrepentant and rebellious.

Blameless and pure. Okay, that does not mean sinless. But it means no one can fault you in your conduct.

There is a high moral integrity, moral innocence, honesty, sincerity and uprightness in your character. Then, you will shine among them like stars in the sky as you hold firmly to the word of life.

By holding to the word of life that is the gospel, you are witnesses for Christ to an unbelieving world.

A star-lit night sky unfortunately is a rare sight in Kuching because of clouds and light pollution.

But it really is an awesome sight to behold. And Jesus said in Matthew 5:16, let your light shine before others that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.

[16 : 16] love. So, when the Philippine church had been proven faithful in this manner, then Paul says in verse 16, he will be able to boast on the day of Christ, that is on the last day, that he did not run or labour in vain.

His work in gospel ministry among them had borne true and lasting fruits. It had all been worth it.

His boasting is in the obedient Philippians and in God.

God who carried to completion the good work that he had begun in them. So, the question I have for myself and for us at this point, does our word and attitude support or undermine our service to God?

Is my life and character or the character of our church, is it attracting people to Christ or is it turning people away? Thirdly, Christian service can be costly but joyful.

You find that in verse 17 to 18. I'll just read verse 17 and 18. But even if I'm being poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and service, or more literally the sacrificial service coming from your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you.

[17 : 48] So, you should be glad and rejoice with me. Oh, this verse, I had to crack my head like crazy. How to put it?

It's so difficult to understand sometimes. Let me try. We see in Paul's life, life. But, okay, let's just start.

When we look at this verse, what strikes us? Firstly, we see in Paul's life and in the life of the church that faithful service can be costly. Paul was imprisoned, facing trial, and possible execution.

The service of the Philippians was described as sacrificial in nature. Apart from persecution, service to God required some amount of sacrifice, of time, of comfort, of finances, and so on.

Many Christians around the world today endure persecution and suffering for following and serving Jesus. And it might be true for some here as well.

[18 : 58] Opposition from family, at work, or neighbor. For others of us, our Christian service may cost us our time, our finances, our comfort, our reputation, our choice of work and placement.

At your place of work, you may encounter a glass ceiling that hinders your promotion or career because of your faith. It could also mean transferring to a different state for the sake of the gospel, of giving up a choice posting to serve in a small town, thereby jeopardizing your career advancement, but a town where you can serve in gospel work.

It can mean giving up your Saturday nights to spend time with the youth, a few hours a week to prepare for Sunday school lessons. Some individuals went incognito to serve a certain people group.

Others spend their time serving in the community in mercy ministries, and many are giving sacrificially to our mission partners for the work in KEC.

And also, let us not forget those at their own expense of time and emotional energy, support others through challenges such as illness, loss, or other hardships.

[20 : 35] So, service does require some sacrifice. Let's go on to verse 17. Let's go back to verse 17. Paul says, and you'll find that, yes, our service will require some form of sacrifice, but you'll find in this verse that there is a lot of joy.

Why is there a joy thinking about Paul getting executed? Now, Paul looks at what Paul says.

He says his death will be a drink offering that accompanies the sacrificial service of the Philippian church. And for that, he was glad and rejoiced with them.

So, his rejoicing is in their obedient and sacrificial service to God, God, which was their offering to God. And they, in turn, should be glad and rejoice with Paul, because he had been faithful to the end.

He followed his Savior, who obeyed his Father unto death. God, so the joy that they have is for their lives that have been lived in faithful service for Christ, both in Paul and in the Philippians.

[22 : 17] That was the joy that they had together. God, and so we too can experience that joy as we serve the Lord in whatever capacity he calls us to.

The joy of seeing people come to salvation in Jesus. The joy of seeing those under your care grow in their knowledge of God, being transformed in their lives by the gospel.

Others who successfully navigate through illness, bereavement, and tragedy with their faith not only intact but stronger. There is great joy when you see the Lord working in the lives of others through you as the gospel becomes more and more precious in their lives.

So at this point, we can ask ourselves, am I willing to sacrifice a bit more in my service for God? Will I ask God to grant me the desire to serve, being willing to give up some things for him?

In the next two paragraphs, Paul presents his travel plans for two of his companions and himself. But more than travel plan, Paul actually holds up these two men as Christ-like examples worthy to follow.

[23 : 45] They exemplify partnership in the gospel, lives worthy of the gospel, having the mindset of Jesus, men working out their salvation in practical service.

You too can be like that as God works in you. So firstly, Timothy. Timothy is Paul's trusted partner in the gospel.

gospel. It has been at least ten years since Timothy joined Paul and Silas in the field. In verse 22, the Philippians knew that Timothy has proved himself in gospel work because they saw him with Paul the very first time Paul arrived in Philippi.

They saw him serve with Paul in the work of the gospel as an apprentice, much like a son learning his father's trade. Over the years, Paul has seen his growth and his character up close.

He has shown Christ-like concern for the spiritual welfare of others. Verse 20, Paul says, he has no one else like him.

[25 : 03] Now that phrase can also mean there is no one else besides Timothy with the same mind as Paul. They think alike.

They feel alike. His attitude and concern for the welfare of the Philippians was like Paul, genuine. And it was precisely for that reason Paul was sending Timothy to them.

Because verse 21 says, everyone else was looking out to their own interests and not the interests of Jesus Christ. Paul does not identify who the everyone else were.

But Timothy, through his gospel work and his concern for the salvation of others, was looking out for the things of Jesus Christ.

So, verse 23, Paul hopes in the Lord that he will be freed to go to Philippi himself. but if he cannot, he hopes to send Timothy.

[26 : 11] He knew Timothy would minister to them on his behalf and he longed to hear news of the church at his return. Has this church obeyed his instruction to continue to work out their salvation in obedience?

Are they more united in their weakness? He hopes for news, news, in verse 19, he hopes for news that will cheer him. You know, gospel workers, whether pastors, Pastor Brian, Sunday school or youth teachers, they appreciate feedback from those they serve.

Few things encourage them more than hearing about people growing in the Lord under their ministry. And if they are not, at least they have an idea and they will work out how to remedy the situation.

In Paul's day, it was astronomically more difficult to receive feedback. You have to literally carry the letter from one place to another. We are living in a world of instant and mostly free communication. So why not drop a line? Now, Paul is very conscious of God's sovereignty. Yes, these are all his plans, but they are left fully to the will of God.

[27 : 37] Look at verse 19, I hope in the Lord Jesus. Verse 14, I trust in the Lord. He commits all that will unfold in his life to the Lord Jesus.

And he will rejoice and be thankful whatever the Lord has in store for him. We have seen that in verse 17. Can we emulate Timothy? Are we concerned for the interests of others, for their physical and especially for their spiritual well-being?

Are we concerned for the ministries to our children and teenagers and college students? Do you think their teachers could do with more help?

Are we concerned when false teaching gains a foothold in BEM churches? Are you concerned when you see your brother or sister turn away from Jesus?

If yes, the least we can do is pray. And if God prompts you to do something about it, ask for his strength and ability to do it.

[28 : 48] And we come to Epaphroditus. I wish I can shorten his name to Epaphroditus. Verse 20 and 25 tells us that the Philippian church sent Epaphroditus to Paul as their representative to help Paul.

Now he was a courier for the church's gift to Paul, likely money and then to take care of Paul's need. This was not a fun vacation.

To be associated with Paul at this time was dangerous. What more to walk into a Roman prison as a Christian?

He knew in verse 13, he knew he was risking his life. And yet he went knowing the danger because the money he brought was needed to cover Paul's daily expenses including food since Roman prisoners relied on friends for support.

This gift would take care of Paul's physical needs but more importantly it will allow Paul to continue in his gospel work even while in chains.

[30 : 11] Epaphroditus' job seemed so ordinary a courier and a servant and yet it was vital for Paul's gospel ministry.

And verse 30 affirms that what he did as a courier and a servant was also the work of Christ. Can you see your normal work?

As a work for Christ? How can you serve Christ through it? Epaphroditus' friendship grew that Paul called him my brother verse 25 my brother my co-worker and fellow soldier.

And the event that stands out in the account of Epaphroditus was the fact that he fell ill during his service. We do not know the nature of his illness or when he fell ill.

Was it during his journey to Philippi or was it during his time in Rome? But verse 27 tells us his illness was so serious that he would have died if not for God's mercy.

[31 : 34] Paul says God's mercy was not only on Epaphroditus but also on Paul himself. His healing spared Paul sorrow upon sorrow.

His death would have been devastating to Paul. Oh come on didn't Paul remember the sovereignty of God and that to die and be with Christ is gain?

Of course he did. But none of us not even Paul is spared from the sorrow we feel at the death of someone we love.

Jesus himself wept at Lazarus' tomb. In verse 25 Paul thinks it is necessary to send Epaphroditus back to Philippi.

Epaphroditus was in mental distress for two reasons. One he was homesick longing for those back home.

[32 : 45] I think his near death experience would have made his longing for home worse. And then he heard that his friends back home knew he was ill and that caused him even more distress because he imagined his friends and family worrying sick for him.

Talk about someone who is thinking about others. Verse 28 Paul decided it was best all around to send him back.

Epaphroditus would be home with his loved ones. they would be glad to see him alive and well and the church will know that their gift was received with gratitude and Paul would have one less thing to worry about in the Roman prison.

Epaphroditus was probably the person who carried this letter to the Philippians to the Philippian church. He had gone back to his work as a courier.

that too was gospel ministry as the instructions contained in this letter would enable the church to continue to grow in their faith and obedience while waiting for the possible arrival of Paul or Timothy himself in person.

[34 : 15] The church would be happy to know that one of their own is now a brother co-worker and a fellow soldier of Paul. And Paul reminded them in verse 30 that Epaphroditus had risked his life to make up for the help they themselves could not give him.

And so Paul tells them in verse 29 make sure to welcome him in the Lord with great joy and honour people like him because he almost died for the work of Christ.

the question that arises here for us and for the other Philippians then was are we willing also to risk our lives for gospel ministry?

Risking our lives may be too much for some to consider at this time. What about just stepping out of our comfort zone to serve one another?

So brothers and sisters we have seen examples in these two men of faithful and Christ-like service for the Lord. Christian service is not an optional extra but a normal outworking of a life shaped by the gospel and integral part of working out our salvation before Christ.

[35 : 44] And remember that it is God who works in us first to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purposes in our lives and in others.

And when we serve with others and for others have the mindset of Christ. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. And rather in humility value others above yourself and put their interests above yours.

And remember that our shared service is for the sake of the gospel and for the glory of God. Let's shine as stars in our generation in Kuching.

And lastly, if you feel that you are not yet equipped to serve God, especially in areas involving the Bible, a great place to start if you have not would be to attend Pastor Brian's class on Bible Overview, which is just around the corner.

Don't be lazy. Ask God to give you the desire and the strength to do it. Let's pray. Gracious Lord, make our lives an offering of joyful service to you and to one another.

[37 : 11] send us out as a united church, obedient, joyful, and faithful, trusting that you will finish the good work that you have begun in us.

We offer our lives and our services to you for your purpose and for your praise. We pray this in the name of Jesus our Lord and Savior. Amen.