

## Finding Faithful Friends

Philippians 2:19-30

Rev. Brian Bill

March 1-2, 2025

People get mixed up on my name all the time. Some simply call me “Bill” and I’ve even been called “Brain,” though I’m not sure where that one comes from. When I’m called “Mr. Bill,” people around my age think of his sidekick “Sluggo” and start laughing. Here’s a picture of my dad and my grandpa proudly displaying their “Mr. Bill” t-shirts.

I like to joke that having three first names (Brian John Bill) means that when people say my name, three guys come running. I tell people not to worry if they get my name wrong because it happens all the time. To help you remember which name is my last name, the Bill Family grew up on William Street. You’re welcome.

Our galaxy alone has 200 billion stars, and there are billions of galaxies. Astronomers can’t even count all the stars, much less give names to them. Isaiah 40:26 tells us God notices and names each one because He created them: ***“Lift up your eyes on high and see: who created these? He who brings out their host by number, calling them all by name; by the greatness of His might and because He is strong in power, not one is missing.”***

Here’s a mind-blowing thought: God knows the names of every star and He knows the names of every person on planet earth, in every country, language and tribe. Isaiah 43:1 says, ***“Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name, you are mine.”***

Many of you know that we partner with Fishers of Men Ministries in Kenya. Around 40 individual children are being sponsored by people from Edgewood, including two named James and Grace, who are supported by the generosity of our EdgeKids ministry. Recently, our children sent James and Grace a video greeting. They responded by sending a greeting back. In the first one, their classmates quote John 3:16 and then James and Grace give a personal greeting to Edgewood.

### Play Video

I’m so grateful for the outstanding job Marcy Kongkousonh is doing as our Children’s Ministry Director. Due to the growth of our ministry to children, our

members unanimously approved the renovation of our children's restrooms on the lower level. This project will begin at the end of April after the Awana season ends. Speaking of Awana, this week the boys and girls held a contest to see who could donate more pennies for Pregnancy Resources. The total amount given was \$444.85! The boys and girls both gave generously, but the girls gave more.

We're also appreciative of the stellar work Liesl Parks and Becca Rollins have been doing as part of our staff here at Edgewood. Liesl serves as our nursery coordinator, and Becca serves as our preschool coordinator. Because of their growing family needs, both of them let us know they want to focus more on their families and will be stepping back from their positions in the coming months.

As we move forward to meet the ever-growing needs of an increasing number of children, the deacons recently approved a new 20-hour-per-week Children's Ministry Assistant position. Rather than focusing just on the nursery and preschool, this person will support our Children's Ministry Director in planning, execution, and overall operation of the Children's Ministry as a whole. If you're interested in applying, or you have a name we should consider, please see Marcy or send an email to [info@edgewoodbaptist.net](mailto:info@edgewoodbaptist.net).

It has been said that an individual is fortunate if they have five good friends in their lifetime. In his book, "What Americans Believe," George Barna writes, "*Americans are among the loneliest people on earth.*" Maybe it's because of our fast-paced society or our rugged American individualism but many of us struggle to find friends. We saw this phenomenon clearly in the 1990s when the most popular television shows like "Seinfeld" and "Friends" were about groups of friends trying to find their way together. The theme music for "Cheers" emphasized how we like going to a place where everyone knows our name.

Sometimes we think that God is only concerned with spiritual matters. The truth of the matter is this: Jesus Christ died in our place, not only to restore our relationship with God, but also to firm up our friendships with other people. In fact, the Bible has just as much to say about interpersonal relationships as it does about theology and doctrine.

As Beth and I have been reading the Bible together using the Edgewood Bible Reading Plan, we've been struck by how many names are listed in the Book of Genesis. We're determined to read each name out loud, even though we know we're slaughtering the pronunciation. We figure each of these individuals matter

enough that God put their names in the Bible, so we don't want to skip over them. Aren't you glad God doesn't skip over you, even if you have three first names?

A college freshman sent an email to his dad to let him know he needed some money: *"Dear Dad, I'm 100 miles from home, I'm flat broke and I have no friends, what should I do?"* The dad wrote back: *"Dear son, make some new friends."*

Here's our main idea: *To grow in faithfulness, make some faithful friends.*

We all need friends who will sharpen us by giving us advice and counsel. Proverbs 27:9 says: ***"Oil and perfume make the heart glad, and the sweetness of a friend comes from his earnest counsel."*** Proverbs 27:17 says, ***"Iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another."*** Speaking of Iron Sharpens Iron, there are ISI conferences coming up for men on March 22 and for women on April 12.

I find it interesting that the Bible lists over 3,000 people by name. The Apostle Paul mentions at least 76 people by name in his writings. Amazingly, he lists 29 individuals by name in the sixteenth chapter of Romans alone, and he had never been to this church before, and he didn't have Facebook to help him!

In our celebrity culture, most of our role models are those who have achieved success in music, sports, or acting. In our passage for today, we're given two role models who are very down to earth. Two names that consistently make the top of Paul's "friend list" are Timothy and Epaphroditus.

### **Timothy Was an Unselfish Servant**

In Philippians 2:19-24, Paul expresses his high regard for Timothy as he holds him up as an example of an unselfish servant: ***"I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, so that I too may be cheered by news of you. <sup>20</sup> For I have no one like him, who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare. <sup>21</sup> For they all seek their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. <sup>22</sup> But you know Timothy's proven worth, how as a son with a father he has served with me in the gospel. <sup>23</sup> I hope therefore to send him just as soon as I see how it will go with me, <sup>24</sup> and I trust in the Lord that shortly I myself will come also."***

This chapter begins with Jesus as our ultimate example to follow. As we learned last weekend, Paul's life is also a pattern for us to follow. However, it's not easy to be like Jesus or Paul, so we're also given Timothy and Epaphroditus as models.

2 Timothy 1:5 gives us some background on Timothy: ***“I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, dwells in you as well.”*** Paul gave a public shout out to these missional mothers in a time when women were rarely mentioned by name. This mother/daughter discipleship team took their roles seriously. We could say it like this: A mom can live missionally with or without the help of a dad.

The Apostle Paul discipled Timothy. He became a partner with Paul in the Gospel and served as the pastor of the church in Ephesus. Timothy was originally from Lystra in modern-day Turkey. He grew up in a multicultural house with a Greek father and a Jewish-Christian mother and grandmother. This exposure to Greek and Jewish traditions served him well as he helped Paul spread the Gospel to Gentiles.

Timothy was with Paul in Corinth (Acts 18:5), was sent into Macedonia (Acts 19:22), was with Paul on the return trip from Jerusalem (Acts 20:4), and assisted Paul in the writing of Romans, 2 Corinthians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, and Philemon. It has been said that Timothy was Paul’s *“sole authorized representative”* of the Gospel.

At first glance, this section of Scripture reads like a travelogue, but it is more than that. Let’s see what we can learn from Timothy.

**1. Become more caring.** In verse 19, Paul hopes to send Timothy to the Philippians for two reasons. First, to encourage them. Second, for him to be encouraged when Timothy comes back with news about them. In verse 20, Paul says he had no one else ***“like him.”*** That’s quite a compliment. This phrase means, *“having the same soul and being like-minded.”* What set him apart was how much he cared for fellow followers of Jesus. The phrase ***“genuinely concerned”*** can be translated as, *“sincerely burdened for the welfare of others.”*

**2. Be like Christ.** Timothy was not only caring; he was also Christlike according to verse 21: ***“For they all seek their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ.”*** The word ***“all”*** covers everyone. Timothy stood out from everyone else because his interests were consumed with the interests of Christ. I’m reminded of 1 Corinthians 16:10: ***“When Timothy comes, see that you put him at ease among you, for he is doing the work of the Lord, as I am.”*** In contrast, I think of another associate of Paul’s who bailed on his beliefs: ***“For Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me”*** (2 Timothy 4:10).

**3. Bind yourself to Christians.** Timothy could be counted on because he was consistently committed to gospel purposes. We see this in verse 22: ***“But you know Timothy’s proven worth, how as a son with a father he has served with me in the gospel.”*** The word **“proven”** means, *“tested by fire, to be approved after testing.”* Timothy was seasoned by suffering and had a remarkable reputation.

Paul viewed him as a spiritual **“son”** who served with him as they struggled through trials together while proclaiming the gospel. Because he was so close with Timothy, he could send him to the church in Philippi, even as he hoped he would also be able to go, if the Lord allowed in verses 23-24: ***“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.”***

*To grow in faithfulness, make some faithful friends.*

### **Epaphroditus Was a Suffering Servant**

Let’s listen to 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, <sup>26</sup> for he has been longing for you all and has been distressed because you heard that he was ill. <sup>27</sup> 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. <sup>28</sup> I am the more eager to send him, therefore, that you may rejoice at seeing him again, and that I may be less anxious. <sup>29</sup> So receive him in the Lord with all joy, and honor such men, <sup>30</sup> for he nearly died for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete what was lacking in your service to me.”***

Here are some lessons we can apply from the example of Epaphroditus.

**1. Develop a partnership mentality.** We see this in verse 25: ***“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.”*** Notice how Paul describes Epaphroditus:

- **“My brother.”** This literally means, *“from the same womb.”* When you are born again, you are given a new forever family with spiritual brothers and sisters in Christ.
- **“Fellow worker.”** They are workers together in the furtherance of the gospel. Philippians 1:5 says we are more than just a community of brothers

and sisters; we are also committed to a cause: ***“Because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now.”***

- ***“Fellow soldier.”*** If you are committed to service, you have entered spiritual warfare. We are a community, we’re part of a cause, and we’re in spiritual conflict with an evil enemy.
- ***“Your messenger.”*** This word is commonly translated as *“apostle”* or *“sent one.”* We use the word missionary in this way. An example of this is Aaron and Amanda Langworthy who are being sent from Edgewood to minister to the unreached in Uganda. While they are receiving significant support from our church budget, they are still in need of individual partners so they can be sent out in 2025.
- ***“Minister to my need.”*** This is the word for *“servant.”* Epaphroditus locked into meeting Paul’s needs. The only other time he is mentioned by name is found in 4:18: ***“I have received full payment, and more. I am well supplied, having received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God.”***

I love the family language Paul used when he affectionately referred to Timothy as a son and to Epaphroditus as a brother. I like hearing how various churches communicate their core values. Here’s one I heard this week: *“Where guests become friends and friends become family.”* I think we should borrow this.

On the Edgewood 4G podcast this week, I interviewed Jenny Halupnik, the Director of Engagement at One Eighty, along with Jenn Moritz, the women’s home supervisor. One Eighty is one of our newest Go Team partners. I was struck by how both of them referred to the staff and residents as family members of Christ. Check out this brief clip.

## **Play Podcast Video**

Props to Will Kabala for producing our weekly podcasts and to Dave Bennett for training him! Each week, we release an audio episode on Spotify and Apple Podcasts and the video is posted on the Edgewood YouTube channel and our Facebook page. This week Pastor Kyle interviewed Go Team partners and former interns Jim and Amy Smith for an upcoming episode.

**2. Desire biblical community.** Notice the depth of feelings Epaphroditus had for the Philippian church in verse 26: ***“For he has been longing for you and has been distressed because you heard he was ill.”*** Paul expressed something similar in Philippians 1:8: ***“For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the***

*affection of Christ Jesus.*” The word “*distressed*” refers to mental, emotional, or spiritual anguish. Epaphroditus was sad when he heard they knew he had been sick.

I talked to a sweet woman at the SecondWinders luncheon who told me she’s still engaging in our services online because health issues keep her from gathering in person. She told me she longs to get back and was thrilled she could attend the luncheon. Many are watching right now because they are in a similar situation.

Unfortunately, there are others who could come but don’t, either because they are out of the habit, or they’ve allowed other activities to take precedence over gathering with God’s people. My caution to them is that once you get in the habit of missing church, you’ll no longer miss it. In my experience, once you unplug, you’ll eventually unravel. If you struggle in this regard, ask God to help you yearn to gather with God’s people and then learn how to get back in the saddle.

**3. Deal with problems joyfully.** In verses 27-28, we see how God brought healing in His time and in His way: “*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.*” Let me mention three points here.

- **When people get sick, it doesn’t necessarily mean it’s their fault.** Because we live in a fallen world, illness occurs. While a sinful lifestyle may lead to sickness, let’s not be like the disciples who looked at a blind man in John 9:2 and asked, “*Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?*” I like the answer Jesus gave in verse 3: “*It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him.*”
- **Paul did not miraculously heal Epaphroditus.** There’s no evidence that Paul healed him, only that Epaphroditus eventually recovered. In verse 27, it says “*But God had mercy on him.*” No matter what you’re going through, remember this phrase, “*But God.*” The words, “But God” are two of the best words in the entire Bible, found some 45 different times. He might not heal you physically, but He will help you. When you feel weak, remember Psalm 73:26: “*My flesh and my heart may fail, BUT GOD is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.*” Are you in a storm right now? Remember... but God. Are you struggling? But God. Are you caught

in a cycle of sin you can't seem to break? But God. Are you facing an impossible situation? But God. When it feels like there's no way, Yahweh will make a way.

- **Grief and sorrow are real when we experience pain and loss.** When we invest in people and build close relationships, we feel the effects when they are sick or when they die. Paul is pleased that he was spared this grief when Epaphroditus was healed. This is a good reminder to come alongside people when they're struggling. That's one reason we have GriefShare and DivorceCare, which start again Sunday afternoon at 2:00 pm.

**4. Devote yourself completely.** In verse 29, we're called to accept and honor sold-out servants like Epaphroditus: ***“So receive him in the Lord with all joy, and honor such men...”*** The Philippians were given two instructions regarding Epaphroditus.

- **Receive him with rejoicing.** The idea is to accept him like a long-lost friend. This same word is used of Jesus ***“receiving”*** sinners by eating with them as He did so with grace and joy.
- **Recognize him with respect.** To honor is to treat someone as weighty, giving him the respect he is due. This makes me think of how we all feel about Pastor Brown, who faithfully served this family for 44 years. 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13 captures this well: ***“We ask you, brothers, to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work...”***

As we learned last weekend, Paul poured himself out like a sacrificial drink offering. In verse 30, we see that Epaphroditus did the same: ***“For he nearly died for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete what was lacking in your service to me.”***

The phrase, ***“risking his life”*** means to, *“hazard, to throw aside one's life, or to gamble.”* This word became a noun with the formation of a group of Christians in the third century. They called themselves the “parabolani,” the gamblers, in honor of Epaphroditus. Whenever and wherever a plague would hit, these “gamblers” would “roll the dice” by rushing in to take care of the sick and bury the dead. They were willing to risk their lives to live out the Gospel. Jesus said it like this in Matthew 16:24-25: ***“If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and***

***take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.***

I often say I'd like to be called home to glory while I'm in the middle of preaching a sermon. Like Epaphroditus, I want to finish strong by giving all to Christ, as we read in 2 Corinthians 12:15: ***"I will most gladly spend and be spent for your souls."***

*To grow in faithfulness, make some faithful friends.*

## **Action Steps**

1. **Work at learning the names of people.** Several studies reveal hearing your name activates brain regions responsible for thought patterns and behaviors related to your identity and personality markers. This is a fancy way of saying we automatically feel more valued and engaged when someone uses our name.

I wish I was better at remembering names, but it is something I work at. Here are a few tips I've picked up over the years. Actively listen when someone introduces themselves, repeat their name immediately, try to associate their name with a visual feature or something you already know, and use their name naturally in conversation throughout the interaction. Sometimes asking someone to spell their name will help you see the name in your mind. If that doesn't work, simply call them, "brother" or "sister."

2. **Choose your friends wisely.** Proverbs 13:20 says, ***"Whoever walks with the wise becomes wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm."*** In his book, *"Restoring Your Spiritual Passion,"* Gordon MacDonald describes five types of people that either ignite or evaporate our energy.

- |        |                                |                    |
|--------|--------------------------------|--------------------|
| • VRPs | <i>Very Resourceful People</i> | Ignite Our Passion |
| • VIPs | <i>Very Important People</i>   | Share Our Passion  |
| • VTPs | <i>Very Trainable People</i>   | Catch Our Passion  |
| • VNPs | <i>Very Nice People</i>        | Enjoy Our Passion  |
| • VDPs | <i>Very Draining People</i>    | Sap Our Passion    |

To have balance in our lives, we need to make sure we're not overloaded with one or two of these types of people. I would add that we need friends

like Timothy and Epaphroditus who are resourceful and important because they sharpen us. The trainable, and to a lesser extent, the nice and the draining, are people whom we can sharpen. In other words, we should have friends who rub off on us in a good way and we should be rubbing off on others, without letting them rub us the wrong way!

3. **Join this church family.** We had 10 join last weekend and one this weekend. I talked to someone this week who told me he asked another EBC member to serve as his spiritual father and now they are meeting on a regular basis. Some of you are ready to become part of the Edgewood family as together we live on mission by glorifying God and making disciples of Jesus among our neighbors and the nations.
4. **Ask Christ to save you.** As important as friendships are, we must apply the truth of Proverbs 18:24: ***“A man of many companions may come to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.”*** The phrase, ***“come to ruin”*** literally means ***“to break in pieces by a blow.”*** It’s the same word used in Daniel 2:40, where we read of the legs of Nebuchadnezzar’s image being destroyed and ground to powder. A person with many companions or a few close friends can still be broken into pieces by the blows of life.

Some of the most miserable people in the world are those who have pinned their hopes for fulfillment on other people only to have those people fail them. Friend, God created you with a void in your life that cannot be filled by relationships. He longs for you to find what you’re looking for in a friendship with His Son.

Even though our friends might fail us, there is ***“a friend who sticks closer than a brother.”*** We need a forever friend, one who will never leave us or forsake us. The word ***“sticks”*** literally means, ***“cleave, or adhere”*** and refers to the joining of two metals together. When we put our faith and trust in Jesus, we are welded to Him forever and nothing can separate us from Him. Charles Spurgeon once said, ***“He who would be happy here must have friends; and he who would be happy hereafter, must above all things, find a friend in the world to come.”***

5. **Surrender to the Savior and serve Him with all you have.** Have you just been living for yourself? It’s time to surrender to the Savior and serve Him for the rest of your life.

## Communion

1 Corinthians 11:28 says we're not to take communion flippantly: ***“Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup.”*** The bread represents His body, and the cup is a reminder of His blood which paid the ransom price for our forgiveness and freedom.

## Confession Time

We practice open communion, which means you don't need to be an Edgewood member to participate, but you do need to be a born-again believer.

Our deacons and pastors will distribute the trays by passing them down each row. When the tray comes to you, simply lift a cup straight out. You'll notice there are two cups stacked together. Give a little twist and hold one in each hand until everyone is served so we can partake together.

BTW, all the bread is gluten free, and we use grape juice instead of wine.

## Distribution of Elements

Forever family, before we take the bread, let's focus on these words from 1 Corinthians 11:23-24: ***“For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when He was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, He broke it, and said, ‘This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.’”***

Before we drink from the cup, consider these words from 1 Corinthians 11:25-26: ***“In the same way also He took the cup, after supper, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.’ For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.”***

## New Member

Darrel Abney – Saturday at 5