

Joining Jesus' Story
Week 7: 2 Examples

We are working toward **restarting** in-person children's ministries. We'd love to hear your thoughts as parents, grandparents.

Join Jesus' Story challenge this winter...Be here, read in one setting, read it bit by bit, memorize and feed on 2:6-11, join a bridge group/relational setting.

Today's portion of Philippians is a **strange section**. It feels almost like it doesn't belong. Some have even said that it was **written like a conclusion**. **Maybe Paul thought he was done** and then decided he wasn't and kept going. **I don't believe that** is the case, but it is a weird group of verses.

This is a **letter, written from prison**, to his new church in Philippi. It is typical of letters in that day in several ways. First, he talked about **what he is going through** and how God is using it to **further his gospel**. Paul is going into **Jesus' story** and then how we can join that story. Then he talks about **what is going on in Philippi and how they need to live and have the attitudes** that Jesus had in a culture that isn't Christian.

That brings us to what Paul really challenges his readers to do in response to Jesus' story. **Above all, you must live as citizens of heaven, conducting yourselves in a manner worthy of the Good News about Christ. Then, whether I come and see you again or only hear about you, I will know that you are standing together with one spirit and one purpose, fighting together for the faith, which is the Good News. Philippians 1:27 NLT**

Then, in chapter 2, he makes this point about how to have the same attitude as Jesus, who took on the role of a servant. **Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Philippians 2:4 ESV**

Before we read today's strange passage, we need to use these verses as our heading. In these verses, there are **three key areas that Paul is challenging them to live like Jesus**. By the way, these are the same challenges that keep coming up in this letter. These challenges are also for us, in our culture.

Allegiance to the King and His Kingdom.

This demands that you know who the king is and submit to him. Then look for his reign happening in this world and join that.

In our **Gospel definition** we say it this way.

The Gospel is...The Kingdom of God has been ushered in through Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus is Christ, the King, God in a human body...

The Kingdom of God is what Jesus came to announce. It was what he spoke about almost exclusively during **the first year** of his public ministry. **It is the restoration of God's rule over all things.** It is expanding and moving forward. **"Your Kingdom come, your will be done, on earth, as it is in heaven."**

Paul uses a phrase, translated **"manner of life"** (ESV), **conduct yourself** (NIV), **live as citizens of heaven** (NLT).

- **This is another way of saying Kingdom of God.**

This has political overtones. Don't conduct yourself **with outsiders who persecute you** in a way that you put citizenship in Philippi as your priority. **Act like you are citizens of the Kingdom of God.** Don't get squeezed into their mold. **Many around them believed that you couldn't be a good citizen of Philippi and be a part of this Jesus movement.** Others believe that it was pressure to **worship the emperor.** This particularly because there were a lot of **retired Roman soldiers** in Philippi who made this a very patriotic city toward Rome.

Behave in a way that puts your citizenship in the Kingdom of God now and in the future, in heaven above, fitting in well in Roman Philippi.

If the Philippians have any confusion about who their real king is, **Caesar or Jesus**, or have confusion about the kingdom they are to serve and be loyal to, **Rome or The Kingdom of God**, then they won't last. It's no different for us. Is my allegiance to **myself, as King**, and my kingdom is **my family** or maybe **The United States of America?**

Once my allegiance is settled, **now I can start moving**, but where or in what direction? Paul's next challenge is that...**The Gospel is my compass**.

The facts about Jesus, that he came to announce the **Kingdom of God**, that he is **Christ, which means king**, he **died on a cross** for us and he was **resurrected** on the 3rd day, are truth. Then when you respond by repenting, believing and following, the gospel becomes your compass for wherever you go next.

My response to Jesus' story...

- Repent...about face.
- Believe...not in him but believe him or trust him.
- Follow...this is obedience to what he is telling us about how to live.

Now, I have a navigational tool that keeps me knowing where **true north** is in the midst of a confusing world where there is **no shortage of voices** trying to tell me where north is.

Now, when I see people stumbling through life, hurting themselves and others because they don't have this navigational tool, I want them to know the Gospel and follow him too.

What would the effect be if I have this compass, but live like I'm trying to find my own way through the woods? There won't be a difference between others and me. I won't be drawing people to Jesus.

Paul's challenge is to make my allegiance to King and Kingdom, to make the gospel my compass and the third challenge is...**Redirect my focus outward**.

Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Philippians 2:4 ESV

This is a learned behavior. Our culture teaches us that **we need to be happy**. In order to be happy, **I need to pursue getting what I want** or what makes me happy. I need to put my **pursuit of personal happiness and self-fulfillment** as my top priority. **And I don't try to hurt anyone in this pursuit.** Somehow it will **magically work out**, me getting mine and you focusing on getting yours.

This is resetting the target in a way that is aligned with Jesus's story. It's changing my gaze so that I am focused outward and not inward. It's about others. It's about **lower or emptying** myself, on behalf of others, and then I will find a life that is full. But it's not natural. **It has to be somewhat mechanical, because there is constant gravitational pull back toward taking care of me.**

That is why we ask these **two questions in our bridge groups** each week. After asking "How have you seen God's goodness this week." We then ask, "How am I doing with loving those you have put around me?" **These two questions get us off of our favorite subject** and first onto God and then, instead of returning to myself and how happy God is making me, I put it on serving others around me.

Allegiance to King and Kingdom, The Gospel as the compass and redirecting our focus outward is **what Paul wants the Philippians to do and it's the same for us.**

To this point, Paul has used the story of Jesus and his own life and struggles as examples of how his readers live these three things. Now he tells them about **two other people as living examples** of joining Jesus' story. "Ok, Paul is our leader, so I'm not going to be able to relate to everything about him. **And then there's Jesus**, I'm called to have his attitude, but I can't even do that unless he helps me. **How about some examples of regular people?"** Ok here's two.

¹⁹ I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, so that I too may be cheered by news of you. ²⁰ For I have no one like him, who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare. ²¹ For they all **seek their own interests**, not those of Jesus Christ. ²² But you know Timothy's proven worth, how as a son with a father he has served with me in the gospel. ²³ I hope therefore to send him just as soon as I see how it will go with me, ²⁴ and I trust in the Lord that shortly I myself will come also. 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, ²⁶ for he has been longing for you all and has been distressed because you heard that he was ill. ²⁷ 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. ²⁸ I am the more eager to send him, therefore, that you may rejoice at seeing him again, and that I may be less anxious. ²⁹ So receive him in the Lord with all joy, and honor such men, ³⁰ for he nearly died for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete what was lacking in your service to me.

What Paul is doing is giving **Philippians 2 real life examples of people who have joined Jesus' story.**

The question is, why these two? What makes them living examples of what Paul hopes to see one day when, Lord willing, he gets to visit Philippi.

What does it take to be an example?

What does it take to be an example of Jesus' story and his attitudes when there is resistance in the culture?

This sounds like a really lofty goal. It seems almost arrogant to plan on being an example for someone else. "Hey, I know me and I'm no example for others. I'm too new to the faith. I don't know enough. I'm too shy. You don't want to know my past. There's so much that I don't understand about faith. I have persistent sin problems. I'm too old and my time has passed. I'm nothing special, just a regular person.

Listen to what Paul said to the church in Corinth. **And you should imitate me, just as I imitate Christ. 1 Corinthians 11:1**

It's not arrogant for Paul to say this because it is pointing back to Jesus and it is Jesus that specifically told him to go to the gentiles. Therefore, it is not arrogant for any of us to imitate Jesus and have others imitate us. They get to know Jesus, through us, as living examples. It's Jesus living his life through us that they are actually imitating.

This is not setting us above anyone because the example is a servant.

It's not about talent, intelligence, who you know, power, wealth or culture, how long you've been in the church.

It's about those three things from above...Allegiance to King and Kingdom, The Gospel as your compass, and redirecting your focus outward.

Here's Paul's first example...**Timothy, Paul's apprentice.**

Don't let anyone think less of you because you are young. Be an example to all believers in what you say, in the way you live, in your love, your faith, and your purity. 1 Timothy 4:12

He was too young to be taken seriously, particularly standing alongside Paul. Paul was the man, an imposing leader, who was highly trained in the law and the prophets. There are **alphas and there are **betas**. There are **wolves** and there are **lap dogs**. Timothy is the latter compared to Paul. **So why compare?****

So why point out Timothy as an example of someone who has joined Jesus' story? Which one of those three things does this sound like?

For I have no one like him, who will be **genuinely concerned for your welfare.**

Remember there are others who are preaching the gospel, but not out of genuine concern for others, but for their own advancement and to stick it to Paul. Timothy is different.

Paul isn't going on and on about Timothy's talent, ability, leadership skills. No, it's that he has his focus on others. But there's more. **But you know Timothy's proven worth, how as a son with a father he has **served with me in the gospel****

- He puts the **advancement of the gospel above all things**, as Paul does.
- He is **willing to be like a son and a servant, lowering himself,**

Timothy put others first with "genuine concern," took the lower position of a son, and "served." Paul elevated him to an example.

Epaphroditus Paul's helper.

He was sent to Paul to bring a gift from the people in Philippi and he was also sent to meet Paul's needs. This was a way they could help their leader in his present situation.

Is this a risk for Epaphroditus? Of course, he is befriended a disgraced jailbird. That's how some would view him. **It was in Philippi where Paul caused a riot and was almost killed. He was arrested and severely beaten.** Now Epaphroditus is going to go visit him and associate himself with a less than popular man in his hometown.

And of course, he gets sick and nearly dies.

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

Paul is going to send him back, but not as one who failed to do what he was sent for. **He didn't get to serve Paul as he hoped** because he got so sick he almost died. Paul seems to be **making sure that he is honoring Epaphroditus' sacrifice and desire to serve, instead of focusing on what he didn't get done for Paul and the Kingdom.**

Paul gives him two titles of honor which are given for the guy who was simply there to help him.

Messenger is like apostle or those who have witnessed Jesus' resurrection from the tomb.

Minister is like a government official, the angels who serve God (Heb 1:7) and temple priests. (Heb 8:2) 154 **"Wait, I thought ministers were only people like me, Julie, Matt..."**

"Brother" does not merely signify that he is connected through Christ, Paul always uses it as a term that carries personal affection. **"Fellow worker"** is elevating Epaphroditus to the same level as Paul. He isn't simply Paul's butler. His work is for the same purpose as Paul's. **It is just as honorable and important as Paul defending the gospel in Rome or planting churches around the world.**

²⁹ So receive him in the Lord with all joy, and **honor such men**, ³⁰ for he nearly died^[£] for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete what was lacking in your service to me.

He lowered himself to come serve Paul and Paul elevates him by calling him "messenger, minister, brother, and fellow worker". He is honored for risking his life for the work of Christ and service to Paul.

In both cases, these men are examples because they lowered themselves to serve and Paul elevates them, by making them examples.

Remember it is not arrogance to think of ourselves as being an example. In reality, we already are. The only question is what are we an example of? It is also not arrogance, because in Jesus' story the example is a servant. Keep in mind; being an example is when you are allowing Jesus to transform you, not that you have achieved anything like perfection.

To learn to paint, Bob Ross is a good example and you don't need Picasso or Rembrandt. To learn to play piano, Altha is an excellent example, you don't need whomever is playing Carnegie hall. A great example for Josiah, learning to be an actor, is Peter Brooks and his daughter Megan, who teaches at MHS, not Tom Hanks. **Regular, relatable people are the best examples!**

Steps to Joining Jesus' Story:

I want to challenge you to do three things this week that are a part of the pattern that Jesus set that can make us examples.

1. Who would be in your letter?

I'll bet they are regular people with whom you rubbed shoulders, people who served you and were genuinely concerned for you. These people were about King, Kingdom, and the gospel.

2. Who do I need to learn from?

Contact this person and set a time to talk. Who is mine?

3. Who do I need to serve?

And be that flawed example of someone learning to follow Jesus.

We have to start viewing ourselves differently. Yes, regular flawed people can be examples of living Jesus' story. **Actually, regular people make the best examples. Start viewing yourself as someone God wants to be an example to others.** Examples aren't flawless or they would be a good real life example. **They are people who are being transformed.**

Maybe this can help as one more step of obedience. **Repeat this phrase daily. "I am one in whom Christ dwells and I live in his unshakable Kingdom."**