The Family of Faith (Philippians 2:19-3:1) Memory Verse: Philippians 3:1b

September 7th 2025 Scripture Reading: Mark 3:20-35

**[SLIDE 1]**

 As we jump back into Philippians today, there are a few things I want to bring to mind again. One, we don’t want to forget that Paul writes this letter from prison. Two, Paul was intimately connected to the Philippian church. He was specially called by God to go serve in Macedonia and Philippi was the very first church that he established. And third, in this letter, Paul is providing for us a context for joy. Paul is joyful because, even in jail the gospel message is spreading. He is joyful because he shares a great affection with this special church, and they can serve the Lord together. Paul is joyful because, as he introduces himself, he considers himself to be a slave to Christ. Such a title reflects the best-case scenario for any of us.

 As we look at the end of chapter two, we are going to see the practical side of Paul as he lays out some plans that he hopes will come to fruition. It is hard to make good plans and see them through while under Roman lock and key. But Paul is also going to share a few words about his friends.

 I’m sure you have heard the famous phrase, **[SLIDE 2]** “Man makes plans and God laughs”. The point here being that we cannot see what is to come, only God knows. The other day, my wife planned to take a trip down to **[SLIDE 3]** Sam’s Club with our daughter Bethany. She needed some supplies before she moved down to Rochester to start school. Apparently Sam’s had some good deals on a laptop computer. Well, it turns out that Bethany’s good friend would unexpectedly tag along for the ride which meant that special mother-daughter time would not happen. So be it. On the way, they stopped at another store so Tracy could feed that baby who started fussing. While accomplishing that task, the battery in the van died **[SLIDE 4]** and it needed to be jumped. I was called to the rescue. So my peaceful day in the office became a bit more hectic. I drove down to the scene and saw no **[SLIDE 5]** jumper cables. I had them tucked away in a compartment that I failed to check, which meant another trip to another store. Finally, by God’s grace, as I pulled back into the busy parking lot, the person next to us was already getting into their car to move out of their parking spot, which I then pulled into so I could jump the van. What a plan.

I recently heard a story of a man who was travelling into **[SLIDE 6]** Canada with a group of fellow professionals, but was barred from crossing the boarder because he had forgotten to bring along his **[SLIDE 7]** passport. Sometimes things break down, sometimes things get misplaced, sometimes people get sick. We can never know what might happen. We must make plans loosely because we do not know what is to come. Paul knows this, and so for him, the most important ingredient to add into any plans is a large helping of **[SLIDE 8]** hope. As he writes from prison, Paul knows that making hard and fast plans would be foolish, but he writes anyway, in verse **[SLIDE 9]** 19: “I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to see you soon so that I may be encouraged by hearing about you.” Timothy has been serving as Paul’s right hand man. He is a young Christian but has proven himself to be faithful and hard working. Paul hopes to send Timothy to the Philippians so he can touch base. In Paul’s mind, to send Timothy is the same as going there himself.

 He goes on to speak highly of this young pastor in verse 20. (READ 20-24). You can see that Paul has all the confidence in the world in Timothy. He says he has no one else like him! He is genuine and caring. He prioritizes the cause of Christ over his own interests. This description harkens back to the very beginning of the letter when Paul introduces himself and Timothy as slaves of Jesus Christ. Timothy is a slave in the sense that he lives for his master. He lives to please Christ and to do the work he is commanded to so to the very best of his ability. Timothy works hard and Paul goes so far to say that Timothy is like a son who works with his father. Now Paul was famously single all his life, he never actually fathers children, but it is easy to see here that Paul is speaking in a spiritual sense. He does the same in his letter to Timothy. In 1 Timothy 1:2 Paul calls Timothy “my true son in the faith.”

**[SLIDE 11]** What does it mean to be a spiritual father or mother? Parental love possesses a very specific characteristic…it is the only love that leads to separation. Now this might not apply to our Heavenly Father. We are promised that he will never leave or forsake us. There is no age limit on his presence with us. But when it comes to human parents, we spend an entire childhood gearing up to say goodbye. It could be that I am projecting a bit here as we have just said goodbye to our own daughter as she begins school. But it is true for all parents. The ultimate goal is maturity. Can this child make it on their own? Can this child cope with the challenges of life? Can this child cross the bridge into adulthood? It is a hard and thankless task in many ways. But parents eventually say goodbye and children eventually become adults. It’s a strange relationship and it involves parents to pour themselves into the lives of their children; to love them selflessly and to give of themselves whenever they might be called upon. To be a spiritual parent entails the same goal: maturity, spiritual maturity. Can this person learn to walk in faith on their own? Can they face temptation and overcome sin? Can they feed themselves on God’s word? Do they understand the importance of prayer? Can they discern between truth and lies? Being a spiritual parent calls for the same demands: self-sacrifice and generous investment of time, and prayer. Paul has raised Timothy in the faith, he had become spiritually mature and it can be rightly said that, in Christ, they are father and son. In verse 24, Paul reiterates his desire and hope that he will be able to visit them all soon.

But Paul is not done! He has more to say and another person to recommend to the people of Philippi. **[SLIDE 13]** (READ 25-30) Epaphroditus is introduced as a brother, a co-worker and a fellow soldier. Notice again the familial terms. In Christ, Timothy is Paul’s son and Epaphroditus is his brother. There is an intimacy, a personal unity that binds us together when we serve Christ. It is an identifier that transcends race or genetics. When Jesus was teaching in a packed house, he was alerted that his family had arrived, and they were looking for him. Jesus responded in Mark 3:33 by asking **[SLIDE 14]** “Who is my mother? Who are my brothers?” Looking around at those seated in a circle, he said, ‘Look, here are my mother and my brothers. Whoever does God’s will is my brother, sister and mother.’” Paul exemplifies this reality. Timothy and Epaphroditus are family! And then, by extension, so are the folks back in Philippi. And by extension, so are we here today. If we are in Christ, we are family. We celebrate with one another, we weep with one another, we support one another, we admonish one another. Look around and see: we are bothers and sister, mothers and fathers in the name of Jesus.

**[SLIDE 15]** Epaphroditus was originally from Philippi and he was sent by the church to meet up with Paul in prison and lend his support. He came on behalf of the church to help Paul and to meet his needs. In the course of his service, Epaphroditus became deathly ill. We see that in verse 27. Paul is relieved that Epaphroditus’ health scare did not end in death and he wants to give the church the same assurance. So he sends his friend and brother back and he tells the church to receive him with great joy.

 Finally, I want to close with the first verse of chapter 3. **[SLIDE 16]** “So then, my brothers and sisters, be glad in the Lord. It’s no trouble for me to repeat the same things to you because they will help keep you on track.” Now Paul was not a board-certified psychologist, and he was not a neuro scientist, but what was Paul? At the moment, he was a prisoner. He was a church-planter and a tent maker for a while. But Paul’s identity, from his youth was rooted in his Jewish background. In fact, we know, that Paul took his passion and his beliefs to the highest tier when he became a full-fledged Pharisee. Pharisees were the teachers of the people. They were scholars and philosophers but above all else, they knew the scriptures. Now, at the time, all Jewish males were expected to memorize the Torah, that would be the first five books of the bible: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. But a Pharisee sought to commit the entire Old Testament to memory. Now how does one achieve such a feat? Paul gives us the answer here in verse 1: through **[SLIDE 17]** repetition. Read God’s word over and over again. Read it aloud, recite it aloud, learn how it sounds, learn how it feels to form the words in your mouth like muscle memory. ((Repetition is the only way we learn. Paul knew this…God knows this. Somehow in our day and age, we have forgotten. We take a class one time, hear certain lectures one time, watch a video one time, read a chapter of a text book one time, take a test one time, pass the class and move on to another one. This method of info dump and move on reveals a fundamental flaw in our understanding of how the human brain works. We assume that our minds function like **[SLIDE 18]** buckets. All you have to do is pour information into them and there it resides safe and sound in our bucket. Ancient people knew better. They treated the mind more like a **[SLIDE 19]** sieve. It is a hazardous place for information, because things can be easily dropped or fall through the many holes we contend with in our minds. We have all had the experience. We either can’t recall a piece of information or we have already forgotten it entirely. Repetition is the only recourse we have to combat a sieve-like mind. We need to learn something over and over.)) Musicians know this, that why they spend so much time **[SLIDE 20]** practicing. Athletes know this. Doing the same motions over and over is the only way of doing them better. Modern science knows this. We have discovered that repetition actually forms deep ruts in our physical brain matter. Eventually, our brains form highways and the information we have learned through repetition has no problem being recalled because it has a nice, smooth road upon which to travel.

 So let us not go around giving ourselves so much credit thinking that we have buckets for brains. We are more like sieves. We need some repetition in our lives. That is part of the reason why we attend **[SLIDE 21]** church every week. Why we partake of Holy Communion every month. Why we revisit God’s word again and again. None of these things are “one and done”. The routine of our life of faith is a reflection of an ongoing relationship with the very God who made us.

 So tonight, and this week and moving forward, maybe we don’t watch that favorite movie again, y’know, the one that you can practically recite on your own. Maybe we turn to God’s word, and spend some time telling ourselves again and again the life changing story of the gospel. Maybe we commit to memory larger portions of scripture, maybe a chapter or two. I can’t tell you how many people tell me that they have bad memories. They are just not built for retaining verses like that. They are just not built for memory work. Well, it’s true for all of us. We have sieves for brains. And we need to spend the time and do the work of repeating the information we would like to maintain. Paul knows the value of repetition and it doesn’t bother him in the least to say something again. It’s no trouble for him because, as he says, the repetition will help keep us on track.

 So, a bit of **[SLIDE 22]** review here, repetition if you will. We can and should make plans, but we hold on to them loosely. We don’t know what God might have in store. Also, let us not underestimate the gift we are to one another. We have a bond in Christ that draws us so close we become family: brothers and sisters and mothers and fathers. Jesus himself is our ground for such unity. In addition, let us not overestimate our brain’s ability to retain information. We need to expose ourselves to the word of God each and every day, over and over again. Read it again, memorize it, read it again, memorize it, and then read it again. May God’s word travel the best highways in our brains. Amen.