

INTRODUCTION

There is a popular saying that goes like: behind every successful man there must be a capable woman. It means that for a man to excel in what he does his wife has to be a good support for him. In a traditional family, she is a house-wife who takes care of all the cooking and cleaning, and a mom who nurtures the kids. In some societies stay-home moms do not get the recognition they deserve. But in America we call them “home-makers.” That is beautiful! By saying that, I am not condemning those sisters who pursue their own career. More than likely, after they get off work they still play the roles of a house-wife and a mom. A man needs help from his wife so that he can concentrate on his job. But in fact, a man needs many more people at the work place to be successful. Team work is vital to the business of a company. It is because one person can never do all the tasks. Many years ago, at a music award ceremony in Hong Kong a winning artist made his acceptance speech. Among other people to whom he gave credit, he thanked a senior house-keeper for buying lunch for everyone at the recording studio. Of course, it is not like people would be starving if the elderly person did not do the job. But the singer did not want to ignore the contribution of one team member no matter how small the duty is. The apostle Paul knew the importance of team work too. In the passage that we shall study today, Paul mentioned two coworkers, Timothy and Epaphroditus. There is one thing in common in those two brothers. They lay their own interest aside to focus on God’s work. To build a foundation for our study let us look at some aspects of the two persons. I put the information in a table on the screen.

	Sending of	
	Timothy	Epaphroditus
Background of The Person	Paul’s apprentice and assistant (Acts 16:1-3)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paul’s brother-in-Christ, fellow coworker and soldier (v. 25) • A member of the Philippian church who brought supply to Paul (Philippians 4:18)
Purpose of Sending Him	To report the situation of the Philippian church to Paul (v. 19)	To return home after he recovered from sickness (v. 26-28)
Descriptions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cared about the Philippian church (v. 20) • Cared about the gospel ministry (v. 21) • Like a son to Paul (v. 22) 	Risking his own life for the ministries (v. 30)

We should also take note of the possible sequence of events. When the Philippian church heard that Paul was in prison it sent Epaphroditus to bring resources to Paul. While completing the task, Epaphroditus fell sick to an unknown disease that he almost died of. God later healed Epaphroditus. When Epaphroditus was well enough to travel Paul quickly sent him back because the believers in the church were worried about his health condition. Epaphroditus brought back this letter, which is the whole book of the Philippians, with him. In the letter, Paul stated that he

would soon dispatch Timothy to Philippi when there was an initial decision on his trial. Paul was confident that he would soon be released, and he hoped to visit the church too.

EXPLANATION

1. Complement to the Minister 傳道的伙伴

With that in mind we will see what we can learn from the two brothers. First, Timothy was a good complement to a minister. The name Timothy means “honoring God.” Quite a good name to consider for your next son or grandson! Acts 16 tells us that Timothy’s father was a Greek, but his mother was a Jew and a Christian. In **2 Timothy 1:5** Paul described that Timothy was a third generation Christian: I have been reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also. Timothy had a good spiritual heritage. When Paul met Timothy, he recruited this young brother to serve together in his mission journeys. Bible scholars estimated that the two had been ministry partners for ten years when the Philippian letter was written. By saying that Timothy was like Paul’s son it tells us about Timothy’s love, respect and obedience to Paul. It also reflects Paul’s trust in this student. They had the same missions in mind. Paul said in **verses 20-21**: 20 I have no one else like him, who takes a genuine interest in your welfare. 21 For everyone looks out for his own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. Timothy shared Paul’s heart regarding the Philippian church and the gospel outreach in general. Therefore, when Paul wanted to send someone to the Philippian church he thought of Timothy. By the time Timothy arrived in Philippi the church members should have already learned about Paul’s situation from Epaphroditus. Therefore, Timothy’s visit was not for the church, but it was for Paul. Let us look at **verse 19**: I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, that I also may be cheered when I receive news about you. Timothy’s task was to bring back update about the Philippian church to Paul. Paul wanted to know how the believers were doing under persecution, and whether they were still actively spreading the gospel. Timothy was a good complement to Paul, the minister. This is not the first time Paul sent Timothy as his delegate. Paul wrote in **1 Corinthians 4:17** - For this reason I am sending to you Timothy, my son whom I love, who is faithful in the Lord. He will remind you of my way of life in Christ Jesus, which agrees with what I teach everywhere in every church. Timothy was representing Paul to go to the Corinthian church to deal with its problems of disunity and immoral sins. Timothy was faithful to the Lord and he would speak the same things as Paul would. The way Paul trained Timothy was the same as how our Lord developed His disciples. Jesus recruited twelve people, took them along in His ministries, gave them hands-on training, then sent them out to preach the gospel. Both Jesus and Paul understood that they would not be around in the mission field for a long time. They had to find someone whom they could trust to pass on the baton. A former CEO of the JC Penny Department Store said: “On the first day when I walked into my office one of my goals was to look for a successor.” A company will continue to thrive if there is someone who has the knowledge and experience in the business to step up after the previous leader has left. If there is another person who can do your job equally well, there will be continuity even in your absence. If that happens at your work place, you may worry that if you need to start looking for a job elsewhere. But if it happens in a church then it is God’s blessing. After all, we are not in a competition of who gets the credit for completing a task. We are here to complement each other. I give thanks that we have many faithful coworkers in our church. Some of them have been serving diligently in the same positions for years. The

downside is that they are so busy serving that they do not even have the opportunity to get any spiritual nourishment from our teaching ministries. That is not healthy to them and to our church. I am sure that the Lord has prepared the hearts of other brothers and sisters to serve. We need to recruit them and equip them. God also puts many of you in our church to complement what I do as a pastor. I feel embarrassed that I am not able to call every one of you by name. I am working hard to remember each of you, and that includes your kids too. Therefore, once in a while I will pull one of you aside and ask you about people's names and who is a relative of whom. I am limited in my time and energy too. It would be inefficient for me to visit and care for each individual or family. It will also take a long time for me to share the gospel with every seeker friend of yours. I need your help to share some of my responsibilities. Besides, I may not have the most updated news when someone is sick or has a particular need. Next time when a person tells you about his/her situation, you can simply ask: "Can I tell our pastor about it?" Your help is a great complement to my ministries.

2. Commitment to the Ministry 事工的委身

Faithful partners in the ministries lay their own interest aside to focus on God's work. Timothy showed his faithfulness by complementing the work of Paul. As for Epaphroditus, he showed his faithfulness by committing himself to the ministry. To people in the medical profession the name may sound like some sort of disease. It actually means "lovely." Epaphroditus was a lovely member of the Philippian church, who was sent to bring supply to Paul. When carrying out his task, Epaphroditus was ill due to some unknown disease. Paul described in [verse 27](#): Indeed he was ill, and almost died. But God had mercy on him, and not on him only but also on me, to spare me sorrow upon sorrow. Picture 2,000 years ago when the medical technology was far behind some diseases that are curable now could be deadly then. Therefore, when Paul said that God saved Epaphroditus it was not an exaggeration. Paul continued to say in [verses 29-30](#): 29 Welcome him in the Lord with great joy, and honor men like him, 30 because he almost died for the work of Christ, risking his life to make up for the help you could not give me. Despite his sickness Epaphroditus completed the task. Most Bible scholars believed that Paul was locked up in Rome. If you draw a line between Philippi and Rome the distance is about 600 miles. It is like a round-trip journey between Memphis and Atlanta. Philippi is in the nowadays northern Greece. Most likely Epaphroditus traveled by ship from the Aegean Sea to the Mediterranean Sea, then went west to Italy. Perhaps Epaphroditus became ill on the road. His recovery would surely give Paul and the Philippian believers much joy. Let us do some detective work and connect the dots on what might have happened to Epaphroditus. At that time, not even Paul knew how long he would be in prison. It was possible that Epaphroditus was carrying some money instead of three-months' worth of food supply. Epaphroditus might have some travel companions for his protection. Assuming Epaphroditus got sick when going to Rome but he insisted on completing the journey, then perhaps one travel mate went back to Philippi to give a report on Epaphroditus' health condition. That might be how the church received the news that he was sick. What can we learn from this brother? From Paul's description, Epaphroditus was well-loved by both Paul and the Philippian believers. In [verse 25](#) Paul stated that Epaphroditus was his brother, fellow worker and fellow soldier. Since Epaphroditus was assigned an important task of bringing resources to Paul he had to be a trustworthy person. The church did not want someone to snatch the money and ran away. Epaphroditus could have rested for a while until he was healthy enough to resume his travel. He could have asked the church to send a replacement too. But he understood that

Paul was in urgent need of basic things like clothes and food. Epaphroditus was a man committed to the ministry even when it seems to be inconvenient to him. His love toward Paul compelled him. That reminds me of a person in the gospels who was committed to serve Jesus out of love. In Matthew 26, Jesus was invited to someone's home for dinner. A woman suddenly walked in, and she poured some very expensive ointment on Jesus' head. The disciples criticized that it was a waste of money. How did our Lord react? He said in **verse 10**: ... "Why are you bothering this woman? She has done a beautiful thing to me." Jesus considered what the lady did to Him a beautiful thing. She committed to give the Lord the best service she could, regardless of what other people might think of her action. Then Jesus added in **verse 13**: "I tell you the truth, wherever this gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her." Nowhere else in the gospel did Jesus say, for example, that people had to remember what Peter or John had done. But this act of love by the woman done at an inconvenient time would be honored. We need more people like this lady and Epaphroditus in the church who are committed to ministries. They get the job done faithfully even when it is an inconvenient time. They may serve in unnoticeable roles. Sometimes we take their service for granted and fail to notice their contribution. It is not until these coworkers are absent then we realize their importance. There is no one making coffee and tea, no one shows up in the nursery, trash piled up, bills not paid and our lawn becomes a forest. We should never overlook the hard work these brothers and sisters did. We need to honor people like them. We need to learn from their examples of commitment to the ministries.

CONCLUSION

Faithful partners in the ministries lay their own interest aside to focus on God's work. Timothy was being faithful in complementing Paul, the minister. Epaphroditus was being faithful in his commitment to the ministry assigned to him. We need people like them in the church who are faithful in what God calls them to do. They do not necessarily need to do something earth-shaking. It can be ordinary people doing ordinary things, but it is their extraordinary character that inspires us. It was September 2, 2017 when the University of Southern California football team played its first game of the season. With a little more than three minutes left in the game the team kicked an extra point. Everything was routine, just like what the players did in practice for so many times. But there was something different. The snapper by the name Jake Olson, who played his first ever college game, was blind. Olson had cancer in his eyes. His left eye was removed when he was only 10-month-old. Then at age 12 Olson lost his right eye too. This kid cheers for the USC all his life. He hung around with the team and developed friendship with the coach and players. The night before his surgery Olson spent time at the team practice. Blindness did not stop Olson from pursuing his dream of playing football. He played in high school, and afterward he was admitted to the USC. His coach promised Olson that his name would be called when the time came. Before that September game his coach made a deal with the coach of the opponent. His players would not touch their snapper on the first extra point attempt if their players would not touch Olson when he was on the field. Olson did his part and the kicker scored. The team would have won whether Olson did a perfect snap or threw the ball away. But everyone rejoiced because Olson was being faithful to contribute all that he could to help the team. Brothers and sisters: are you watching from the sideline as your coworkers are serving our Lord diligently? Will you be ready to roll up your sleeves when God calls on your name?