

Introduction: God is full of Mercy, and this is wonderful! I see some of you either getting blank eyes, or trying to appear interested. *** Biblical theology is necessary. We must all know The Bible, and the awesome truths about God that He has put in His Word. However ... we are living, breathing, real human beings. As such, we are easily distracted from a focus on God. And we all struggle with one thing or another. Some people are experiencing multiple difficulties at once. A worldwide pandemic on top of these common experiences is enough to make ordinary people break down. This is why, in addition to big truths, we all need some good real-life examples of how to stay faithful in the work our Lord Jesus, The Messiah, has called us to do to complete His Mission on earth. *** Enter: Epaphroditus. He was a member of the church Paul planted in Philippi. He was picked by the members to be in a group of men bringing their substantial financial donation to the apostle Paul in Rome so he could continue his missionary work while he was under house arrest there. (4:10-22; 1:3-7) Rome was some 900 miles from Philippi. Even on the upgraded Roman 'roads' which allowed people to walk an average of 30 miles a day, this was still a month long journey. *** We heard in the reading that sometime during this month Epaphroditus became so ill he almost died. Due to the importance of his mission, he trusted God and kept going. He had no other choice. There were no hospitals at that time. (The first Roman hospital was built in the late fourth century by St. Fabiola.) But, in his case, God had Mercy on His faithful spiritual warrior and healed him. *** After we consider this account of Epaphroditus, we will consider God's call on us to be spiritual warriors.

I. Paul's fellow-soldier, Epaphroditus, whom he is sending to minister to the Philippian church, almost died, but God had Mercy on him. (Verses 25-27)

A. Paul thought to send the brother, Epaphroditus, who is the messenger and minister of the church, since he was distressed because they heard he was sick. (Verses 25-26)

1. Paul thought it necessary to send Epaphroditus, the brother and his fellow-worker and fellow-soldier. (Verse 25a)
Three titles: First, Epaphroditus is a brother IN Christ to all in the church; then, he is one of Paul's thirty-six fellow-workers and two fellow soldiers.

2. And he is your messenger (apostle) and a minister to my need. (Verse 25b)

Your ministering apostle: The church in Philippi sent him to minister to Paul's financial need.

3. Since he has been longing for all of you, and is distressed because you heard he was sick. (Verse 26)

'Wounded warrior' sent home: For the sake of the church 900 miles away, Paul sends him home.

B. Because, indeed, he was sick to the point of death, but THE God had Mercy on him and Paul. (Verse 27)

1. Because he was also sick almost to death. (Verse 27a)

Risked life for mission: He continued to Rome, risking his life to bring needed support to Paul.

2. But THE God had Mercy on Him. (Verse 27b)

Great Mercy: Yahweh passed before Moses proclaiming He is 'Merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth' (Exodus 34:6-7); Yahweh commanded His people to return to Him because He is 'gracious and Merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness' (Joel 2:13-14); the prophet Micah petitioned Yahweh because He delights to show Mercy (Micah 7:11-18); Mary delighted in her savior God because 'His Mercy is on them that fear Him' (Luke 1:46-50); Paul testified that he, a persecutor, 'obtained Mercy' (1 Timothy 1:12-14); a psalmist said: 'Not unto us, O [Yahweh], not unto us, but unto thy name give glory, for thy Mercy' (Psalm 115:1); Joseph experienced Mercy in an Egyptian prison 'And Joseph's master ... put him into the prison ... But [Yahweh] was with Joseph, and showed him Mercy, and gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison' (Genesis 39:20-21 – all KJV).

Not take lightly: Four of the above seven passages from every section of The Bible talk about God's general Mercy. But, we must not take His Mercy lightly, because we have the testimony of Jesus' human mother and the apostle Paul. Further, we are told of special Mercy for Joseph after he had twice been treated unjustly. Add to this God's Mercy to Epaphroditus and we should be grateful that God's general Mercy is also for individuals in need.

Experience: Jimi Hendrix degraded the question 'are you experienced' in the days of sex, drugs and rock n' roll; but, in light of these real Biblical people, let us ask ourselves: Have we truly experienced God's wonderful Mercy? I pray we all have, just as this 'fellow-soldier' of The Gospel did.

Fellow-soldiers of Christ receive God's Mercy

3. Paul said he also experienced God's Mercy so he did not have 'sorrow upon sorrow'. (Verse 27c)

Paul's drink offering: He had said he was being 'poured out as a drink offering', as with the sacrifices Moses described (verse 17). If his fellow-soldier had died he would have had too much sorrow to bear!

II. Paul also sent him that, seeing him, they would be cheered; so he commands they welcome him IN Lord with joy because he risked his life for them. (Verses 28-30)

A. He sent him with urgency, so having seen him they would be cheered, and Paul would be less concerned. (Verse 28)

1. So with great urgency I have sent him, that after seeing him again, you may receive joy. (Verse 28a-b)

Result: joy: Paul's desire for the church he planted is that they may be made to rejoice over the miraculous Mercy from God that Epaphroditus received.

2. And I might be less concerned. (Verse 28c)

My sorrow less: Paul amplifies what he said at the conclusion of the previous paragraph.

B. Therefore, welcome him IN Lord with all joy, and have high regard for those like him; because, for Christ's work he risked his life until near death, to complete their service to Paul. (Verses 29-30)

1. Therefore, welcome him IN (the) Lord with all joy. (Verse 29a)

Joyful welcome commanded: Paul expects they will gladly welcome the letter bearer.

IN Lord: The source of all joy is The Lord Jesus, and The Holy Spirit He sent. Paul reminds them (and us) people only experience true joy (that overrides all sorrow) IN The Lord of all Creation.

2. And you must have high regard for those like him. (*Verse 29b*)

Honor these men: Paul says there are many brothers IN Christ who, like Epaphroditus, are good examples; and, it is fitting to show them honor for their example of sacrificial service to God.

God glorified IN His servants: As I prayed about this command, I realized it in no way diminishes The Glory of God. All His people do in faithful obedience to God brings Him Glory. (*Matthew 5:16*)

3. Because, for the work of Christ, he came near unto death. (*Verse 30a*)

Willing to die: This fellow-soldier was willing to 'take up his cross' (*Luke 9:23-26*) as a partner in The Gospel to advance the Mission of making disciples of people of all nations (*Matthew 28:18-20*).

Have high regard for those who almost die in the work for Christ

4. Having risked his life to complete what was deficient in your service to me. (*Verse 30b-c*)

Concern reduced: When Epaphroditus arrived with the large gift to support Paul in his work, despite all he endured, Paul realized the church in Philippi was partnering with him in the Gospel (*1:5*).

Paradoxes: Paul loves the church in Philippi, but he still has concerns (*2 Corinthians 11:28*); and, he knows that though all have ultimate victory in Jesus, all must also endure tribulation (*Acts 14:21-22*).

For us: What about us? Will we endure suffering and hardships for The Gospel Mission, even to death if need be? I hope so.

Bottom line: What Paul said about this member of the Philippian church, who risked all in faith to the mission God gave him, though he nearly died, but experienced God's abundant Mercy, is not only for the first century church, but for us. If we are faithful, we will receive Mercy: either to continue in our work here on earth, or to be ushered into His Presence in heaven (*Acts 7:54-60*).

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III. Spiritual warfare – we are in a fight, and we must be willing to suffer.

I struggle with this: I can't speak for anyone but me, but I needed this outline on spiritual warfare because I struggle with this and I want to be a better soldier-warrior for God and Jesus.

- A. The Lord's prayer. (*Matthew 6:9-13*)

1. Lead us not into temptation (*Verse 13a*)

Plea: This is an appeal that temptations will not lead us astray.

2. ... but deliver us from the evil. (*Verse 13b*)

Forceful request: This is a strong petition to be rescued from the evil one (*satan* – the adversary) whenever he wants to tempt us to do the evil that has not yet been purged from us.

- B. We must know three things, and act on our knowledge:

1. Our enemy is the devil and his demons. (*1 Peter 5:8-9*)

Jesus and the devil: Jesus encountered the tempter after the Spirit led Him to fast forty days in the wilderness. At every temptation, Jesus appropriately responded with the Scripture. (*Matthew 4:1-11*) We too can use Scripture appropriately, IF we are always listening to it, and relying on The Holy Spirit. (*John 14:23-27*)

Our struggle: Our struggle is 'against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places'. (*Ephesians 6:12*, NAS)

2. We must know the authority we have IN Jesus Christ. (*Matthew 28:16-20; John 17*)

Jesus has ALL authority: Jesus told the eleven He was given ALL authority in heaven and on earth. (*Matthew 28:16-20*)

In His prayer before going to The Cross, He delegated His authority to the twelve, and all who would believe IN Him.

The twelve: In Gethsemane Jesus asked His Father to protect His disciples and sanctify them from sin, because as He had sent Jesus into the world, so He was sending them into the world. (*John 17:16-19*)

Us: When we are one IN Him, despite our differences, we will let the world know of God's LOVE. (*John 17:20-24*)

3. Know how to fight: we need to put on the full armor of God. (*Ephesians 6:13-18*)

Stand firm: First of all, we must stand firm, neither running away, nor being weak. (*Mark 13:13*)

† **Belt of truth:** Jesus IS The Truth (*John 14:6*). He holds all the armor together.

† **Breastplate of righteousness:** IN Christ, we become the righteousness of God. (*2 Corinthians 5:16-21*)

† **Shoes of Gospel of peace:** As we go, may we be ready to explain our hope in Jesus, even in suffering. (*1 Peter 3:14-18*)

† **Shield of faith:** We must act in faith that God has plans for our welfare and hope in the future. (*Jeremiah 29:11*, RSV)

† **Helmet of salvation:** We are saved through Jesus' death on The Cross; and, we are reconciled and have peace, because Jesus disarmed the evil powers. (*1 Corinthians 1:18-21; Colossians 1:15-20; 2:11-15*) These truths protect our minds.

† **Sword of Spirit, The Word of God:** All Scripture is 'God-breathed' (by The Holy Spirit) so we may be equipped for every good work. (*2 Timothy 3:16-17*)

† **Prayer:** A young boy was tormented by a spirit that made him mute and would dash him to the ground.

After Jesus cast the spirit out of the boy, He told His disciples in private that such an evil spirit can only come out by prayer. (*Mark 9:16-29*)

Soldiers of The Mercy of The Cross: May we become fellow-soldiers OF Christ, so we fight IN His power and authority to complete His victory of Mercy on The Cross by witnessing to Him in all our attitudes, words and actions.

Fellow-soldiers of Christ receive God's Mercy

Conclusion: Paul is sending Epaphroditus, his fellow-worker and fellow-soldier, SO the church in Philippi can see for themselves that God had Mercy on him when he was sick to the point of death while ministering to Paul for them. He is sent so they receive him IN the Lord with joy, and also hold in high regard all who have come near to death for doing the work of Christ.

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