

Shine like Stars

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[0 : 00] It's been my privilege over the years to be involved with different parts of this church, with John Gemmel for many years, with Graham, actually Ali Chalmers is one of my students at Faith Mission a few years ago, and Peter also attended the course.

So it's just a privilege to be involved with different preachers from different kinds of churches and different situations, and also to be involved in teaching at Faith Mission and also at Edinburgh Theological Seminary.

I'm sure you'll enjoy Daniel, who's the Old Testament professor this evening. So we come to God's Word. Let's just pray briefly and ask God to speak to us. Gracious God, we pray that you might, by your Spirit, take your Word, use it to comfort the disturbed and to disturb the comfortable.

And may we be ready and willing to respond to whatever you might say to us. And we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Almost three weeks ago, on July the 11th, 2017, a 93-year-old Scotsman died in a hospital in a town in North India.

I think you'll look in vain to find any record in the Scotsman or in any other media, but Andrew McCabe was a remarkable man, among the finest Christians I've ever been privileged to encounter.

[1 : 32] He was born in a missionary family that originally came from Dalkeith, and Andrew was commissioned as a missionary from Charlotte Chapel in 1950.

And so for 67 years of his life, he devoted himself to providing hope to tens of thousands of young boys from impoverished backgrounds in India and also in Nepal, through schools that he established.

He believed the only difference between a street kid in Calcutta and a privileged child was opportunity. However, what underpinned all of this was his Christian faith.

Awarded somewhat to his surprise in MBE by the Queen in 1992, he told me the story of what happened. He said, I was told that when I went in there, I was not to say anything. I was just to bow. And if Her Majesty wanted to say anything to me, that was her prerogative. Otherwise, bow, get your award, and get out. He had apparently the longest conversation of any of those who were awarded anything that day.

[2 : 37] And Her Majesty spent quite a lot of time talking to him about the boys in India and asking what their needs were. And Andrew said, I told her, Your Majesty, these boys need education, but most of all, they need Jesus.

And what he believed, he lived out. My wife and I witnessed this firsthand. We traveled with him through the jungles on the border with Nepal in northwest Bihar, which is the poorest state in India, seeing how he related to the people and the great love and esteem in which he was held.

Countless numbers of boys received a Christian education. We will never forget watching 3,000 boys in a school playground at assembly. Boys from Christian, Muslim, Hindu, tribal backgrounds reciting together in English the Lord's Prayer.

Many of the boys went on to careers as doctors, teachers, bankers, army, government officials, pastors, many other careers. Indeed, I think somewhat wonderfully, the doctor who treated him in the hospital in Fisabad and his final illness was one of his own boys who had grown up in the home he had provided.

You see, the great thing about Andrew was his Christian service was matched by his Christ-like character. And there was no credibility gap between the two.

[4 : 07] Now, I know that over these past weeks, you've been studying this little letter in the New Testament, part of the Bible, written by a Christian missionary named Paul, who was on trial for his life.

He addresses this letter to these Christians in the Greek city of Philippi, which was a Roman colony in that Greek setting, which had come into being when Paul had visited the city on one of his journeys and preached the good news to them.

And he is keen to remind them that what they believe must be matched by how they behave. How their talk is to be matched by their work.

And if you have a Bible, it would help to turn to Philippians and look at chapter 2. Let's just touch on what you looked at last week. I listened to Graham's great message last week from the first part of the chapter.

So if you've got a Bible or a phone, I'm very suspicious about phones in church, that people are reading the Bible or are they looking at text messages. I'm trusting you here that you're reading the Bible.

[5 : 16] So Philippians 2. Things have changed, haven't they? I'm getting old. Look at what he said. Do everything without complaining or arguing so that you may become blameless and pure children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation in which you shine like stars in the universe as you hold out the word of life.

Here we find a picture and a challenge to them and it's a challenge to us if we claim to be followers of Jesus. The challenge is this, I want to leave with you to focus on and develop, is that we're to shine like stars in the universe.

If you have a modern version, it says shine like stars in the sky, which is just the same, but I kind of like universe. But anyway, shine like stars in the universe. If you look at the night sky, you will see that some stars shine more brightly than others.

Some shine very faintly against such a black, dark background, indistinct. And some Christians shine more brightly than others.

Some, sadly, are hardly distinguishable against the background in which we live, which is becoming, I believe, increasingly dark. Others, like Andrew McCabe, shine brightly, stand out clearly.

[6 : 43] So, what are the characteristics of a shining star in the church? In this next section, as we come to it now, I'm to suggest that Paul describes two men who are known to these Christians in Philippi who are shining examples, two stars who shine more brightly than the rest.

Paul describes the first one of them as one of a kind. He says, I've no one else like him. He says, of the other, he's extremely valuable, should be held in the highest honor. So, let's look at these two shining stars in Philippians 2, 19 to 30.

What I want us to do is to look at each one of them and compare, maybe even contrast, our own attitude and behavior and ask if we too are shining brightly.

So, let's look at the first section. And Paul mentions here a man named Timothy who he describes, I want to suggest, as the soulmate. Look at verses 19 to 24.

I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon that I also may be cheered when I receive news about you. I have no one else like him who will show genuine concern for your welfare.

[7 : 56] For everyone looks out for his own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. But you know that Timothy has proved himself because as a son with his father, he has served with me in the work of the gospel.

I hope, therefore, to send him as soon as I see how things go with me. And I'm confident in the Lord that I myself will come soon. Timothy, if you don't know the Bible, if you do, just a bit of review, is a younger man who's been Paul's closest colleague for many years.

He was the product of a mixed marriage. His mother was a Christian Jewess. His father was a Greek. Timothy came from a town called Lystra, a town in the highlands of the Roman province of Galatia.

I like maps if you don't just ignore that. But Lystra is right in the middle of there. And it's likely that when Paul first visited this town on his journey, that Timothy maybe became a Christian through hearing Paul preach the good news about Jesus.

Because Paul describes him as his son. He's not literally his son. He's his son in the faith. And a few years after this first journey that Paul took, he took another journey, which is commonly known as Paul's second missionary journey.

[9 : 11] And there's the map there going the opposite direction. When he came to Lystra, he discovered that Timothy was maturing, developing in his faith, well respected, and he invited him to join his missionary team.

And so Timothy joined Paul's missionary team and they traveled on further over. They crossed over into Europe for the first time with the good news of Jesus. And the first place they came to where they preached the good news was this town called Philippi.

So the people in Philippi knew who Timothy was. Now, here we are a dozen years later. Timothy has become Paul's right-hand man. He's been entrusted with several important commissions. And so Paul is about to send him back to Philippi. And Paul explains why he's the right man for the job. The only man who fits the bill. Look what he says. He says, this thing is working here. He says, Timothy is one of a kind. He says, I have no one else like him. The word translated there, like him, is an unusual word. It's only found here in the New Testament.

[10:16] The Greek word, I mean. It literally means of equal soul. Paul says Timothy is the only person who has the same soul, the same essential passions, concerns, attitude, ambition.

That's why I've described him as his soulmate. And Paul describes two particular ways in which Timothy shows this scene in his life. The first is focusing on the needs of others.

He says, I have no one else like him who takes a genuine interest in your welfare. The word translated genuine is in Greek Genesis. It's to do with your nature.

Something natural. But in Timothy's case, it is something supernatural. When you become a Christian, when you turn from your sin, you put your faith in Jesus, God puts his spirit within you. You're born again of the spirit of God.

And the Holy Spirit begins to produce the fruit of the spirit. And one sign is that it turns our natural self-interest, looking out for number one, to that of the welfare of other people.

[11:21] In fact, the New Testament constantly says one of the hallmarks that you are a genuine Christian, that God is at work in you by his spirit, is that you have a genuine concern for the welfare of other people.

And especially fellow Christians. But not exclusively. That should be a characteristic of Christians in any local church. Now, that's what it should be like.

But Paul goes on to say, it's not what everyone's like. He says, for everyone looks out for his own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. One commentator writes, the general run of Christians, as far as Paul saw them, put themselves first and Jesus next.

But it was not so with Timothy. And that was why Timothy stood out for the rest and could be described as a soulmate, sharing a similar attitude to that of Paul. Now, let's pause a moment, be practical and direct.

If Paul was writing about this church, and I only know one or two of you, so I'm not pointing the finger at someone I've just suddenly heard about, you know, been told about, but let's be direct.

[12:28] And what proportion of us would be in the category of those who look out for their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ? Some of us? The majority?

A minority? How many Timothys are there among us who genuinely concern for one another, not primarily our own needs? So Paul says he's like that, focusing on the needs of others, but he also says, he shares a common concern, slaving in the work of the gospel.

But you know that Timothy has proved himself, the word is used of proved an experience, because as a son with his father, he has served with me in the work of the gospel.

Paul says, in fact, Timothy is my son in the faith, and he shares with me in the family business. But this is not the kind of business in which son and his father sit in a plush office and employ other people to do all the work, the hard and menial task.

No, Paul says, Timothy has served with me, the Greek word is literally, slave with me. And the work in which they are involved is the work of the gospel, making the good news of Jesus known to all.

[13:43] And the very nature of this work means that you have to adopt the attitude of that of Jesus himself, the attitude and practice of slaves, those who have no rights, but slave for their master to whom they belong.

Now, Timothy has seen what this is like for Paul. On the first visit Paul made to Timothy, to Lystra, he would have seen how Paul, after preaching the gospel, was stoned, dragged outside the city, and left for dead.

Thankfully, he survived, but such things were the common experience of Paul and of all who joined him. So Paul reminds the Christians in Philippi that Timothy had proved himself.

He'd shown his mettle as he had slaved alongside Paul, co-slaves in the service of their master, Jesus Christ. And Paul says, he's therefore the ideal person to come and visit you.

Now, the job description has not changed in 2,000 years. The terms and conditions for a slave and servant of Jesus Christ is gospel work, and I tell you that gospel work is hard and it is costly. [14:51] For you abandon your rights for those of the gospel and the Savior whose gospel it is. So again, let me practical. Let me ask you, as I ask myself as I prepare this, what is it costing you to serve Christ?

Or have you opted out? Well, we all want to know, as Paul puts it later in chapter 3, then we all want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection. But along with it, we're a little more apprehensive about sharing in the fellowship of his sufferings, becoming like him in his death.

What did Jesus become like? Well, if you've been following this series, just a reminder of how the chapter begins. He talks about the way of Christ. And he says, notice the relationship to one another.

In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus, who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God.

Something to be grasped at, to be used to his own advantage. Rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness, being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death, even death on the cross.

[16:07] So again, to be practical, what are your plans? Are you sitting there saying, I'm here, here am I, Lord, whatever you want me to do, I'm available. I'll serve anywhere. I'm wanted.

Whether it's got a title or not, whether it's seen or not seen, I'm prepared to serve others and be a slave in the work of the gospel. Or are you thinking, and as I get older, I find what a temptation it is. Some of you who are my age, or maybe even older, who knows. Now is the chance to let someone else take over. I deserve a break.

It'll be a relief not to have to be here every week to teach those children, count that money, steward of that door, make that coffee, attend that meeting. I'm looking forward to retirement.

I'm glad to hear that Ian is not retiring. He's just being, what's, you say, retire as a retread. I think it's no way. So, now you're Timothy.

[17:05] Paul plans to send Timothy as his valued representative to the church in Philippi for their soulmates. But he says, Timothy can't leave immediately. We need to wait the verdict of the court because Paul is on trial for his life.

He will be needed. Instead, Paul says, I'm going to send someone straight away. So, turn back to the Bible and here we have the second person, a man called Epaphroditus, who I've described as the risk taker.

I'll explain why in a moment. Verse 25, but I think it's necessary to send back to you Epaphroditus, my brother, co-worker, and fellow soldier, who is also your messenger, whom you sent to take care of my needs.

For he longs for all of you and is distressed because you heard he was ill. Indeed, he was ill and almost died. But God had mercy on him and not on him only, but also on me to share me sorrow upon sorrow.

Therefore, I am all the more eager to send him so that when you see him again, you may be glad and I may have less anxiety. So then, welcome him in the Lord with great joy and honor people like him because he almost died for the work of Christ.

[18:14] He risked his life to make up for the help you yourselves could not give me. Of all the churches that Paul founded, only this one church in Philippi supported him financially in his missionary endeavors.

And when the Christians in Philippi learned that Paul was a prisoner in chains in Rome, they decided to send him some practical help. Now, you need to know a bit about the background. In those days when you were put in prison, they didn't put TVs in your prison cell or give you nice meals and other meals or reasonable meals anyway. There were no amenities provided by the authorities.

Relatives and friends had to bring in food and provisions for you. If you didn't have any friends, you suffered or even starved. And even if you had friends, they might be somewhat reluctant to identify with someone who was on trial before Caesar for a capital offense.

But the Philippian Christians were not worried about such things. Instead, they determined this church, and it's a wonderful thing, they got together and decided, we're going to send a gift to Paul and we're going to send one of our members with the gift to give it to him.

[19 : 25] And so they chose one of their members, a man named Epaphroditus. Now, unlike Timothy, we know nothing else about Epaphroditus. It's quite a common name or the shortened form Epaphras.

We know nothing about this Epaphroditus except what is found here. He's named Epaphroditus after the Greek goddess of love, Aphrodite.

Presumably, he came from a Greek background like that. His name, the name means charming, lovely, amiable, and it suited him well. And the task of which he was assigned also suited him well. For we learn that Epaphroditus was not the type who settled for a comfortable existence, but rather we learn in verse 30 that Epaphroditus, he risked his life to make up for the help you could not give me.

Now, again, the word here, translated risk, is a very unusual word. Again, it's another of these words that's only found here in the New Testament. What you have to do if you're a student of the Bible, you have to find other literature from the first century written in Greek to try and work out what it means.

[20 : 29] Its meaning is somewhat obscure, but most people think it refers to a gambler staking everything on the shake of a dice. Now, gambling with dice is not a practice that is endorsed in the Bible, not least because you're risking money on an uncertain outcome.

But the gamble that Epaphroditus takes is commendable because what was at stake was of the utmost importance and the outcome is sure to be favourable. So what risk did Epaphroditus take? In these verses we see that, first of all, he took a risk to his physical health his sickness. Read in the verse there, indeed he was ill.

Somewhere on the journey to Rome, carrying this gift for Paul, or maybe after he arrived, Epaphroditus got seriously ill. We don't know what the problem was, all we know is that it was life-threatening.

Now, there must have been a strong temptation to turn back in the face of such adversity or to return home as soon as he arrived. But Epaphroditus was determined to fulfil his commission no matter what the cost, even if it cost him his life.

[21 : 38] And as it turns out, as we read, indeed he was ill, almost died, but God had mercy on him, not on him only, but also on me to share me sorrow upon sorrow. As with the illness, we have no idea how he recovered.

But whatever the means, Paul attributes it to God's mercy. Still the case today with any healing, whether directly from God, naturally through the body's healing processes, or medically, through the skill of doctors and nurses, God is the author of life.

He's also the author of death. What is important to see is that Epaphroditus was prepared to take this risk, his life for the sake of Christ, because he was following in the footsteps of Christ.

The Scottish professor William Barclay comments that in the early centre of the church, there were a group of Christians who adopted this name for themselves. They called themselves the risk takers.

Let me read what he says. It was their aim to visit the prisoners and the sick, especially those who were ill with dangerous and infectious diseases. And he says in AD 252, plague broke out in Carthage.

[22 : 49] The people there threw out the bodies of the sick and dying into the streets and fled in terror. Cyprian, the Christian bishop, gathered his congregation together and put them to work burying the dead and nursing the sick in the plague-ridden city.

And by so doing, at the risk of their lives, they saved the city from destruction. He then concludes, in all Christians, there should be an almost reckless courage which makes them ready to gamble with their lives to serve Christ and to serve others.

Is it a justifiable risk? Only if we believe that the gospel is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes, Romans 1.16. And only if we believe, as Paul does, as we've studied previously, that for me to live is Christ and to die is gain.

For the Christian, it's a win-win situation, whether you live or whether you die. And Epaphroditus was prepared to take that risk.

But notice the second risk that was also involved here, not only to his physical health, his sickness, but also, you can miss this, but also to his emotional health, his sensitivity.

[24 : 04] Somehow, perhaps, with a messenger going back in the opposite direction to Philippi, the church there learned that Epaphroditus was desperately sick. And so, when Epaphroditus learns they know this, he feels it deeply.

For he longs for all of you as distressed because he heard you, he heard, you heard he was ill. The word translated longs is one of deep desire, not just homesickness, but a deep, gut-wrenching feeling within.

And the word distressed, again, a very interesting word. It is only used elsewhere in the New Testament on one other occasion. The word distressed is the word used to describe the agony of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane when he faced death himself and we're told, sweat as it were, great drops of blood.

That's in Matthew 26, 37 and the parallel in Mark 14, 33. You see, Epaphroditus is one of those rare people who feels what other people feel.

He's distressed when other people are distressed. It's another Christian trait. And while there is clearly a physical risk to serving Christ, there is always an emotional risk if you take the risk of involving yourself with other people.

[25 : 17] I've been involved in Christian ministry overseas and in this country for, well, a good part of my life for 50 years. And one of the great, great challenges is involving yourself with other people.

There is an emotional involvement. There is an emotional demand. It's very painful. And I tell you, if you are in full-time ministry, in so-called full-time ministry, the great danger is to treat it as a professional thing.

But you can't do that in Christian ministry. If you're going to be genuine about being involved in Christian ministry, it means emotional pain. And there's only one way to avoid it, which is to avoid involving yourself with people emotionally.

And some of us feel this more deeply than others. I have a wife who is a very good counselor.

Sometimes I have to stop talking to too many people because it just emotionally exhausts her.

It's just so painful. I have to be honest, I'm a sort of guy who can switch off and put it somewhere in the back of my mind. But when someone someone talks deeply to you and talks about some of the pain and agony and whatever it is they're going through, it's a very painful and demanding experience.

[26 : 34] It was a risk that Epaphroditus was prepared to take. I wonder if you and I are. But Paul is very concerned as he sends Epaphroditus back that the church there don't regard him as some kind of failure.

And so he commends Epaphroditus, uses three lovely increasing terms to describe him. He says, he's my brother, one with whom I'm joined in the deepest affection.

He's my fellow worker, one who served with me in the work of the gospel. And he is my fellow soldier, a comrade in arms who has fought side by side with me against the force of evil.

Epaphroditus says, Paul, he's fulfilled his commission so when he gets back, give him a warm welcome. Welcome him in the Lord with great joy and honor men like him.

In fact, think about this. Epaphroditus is going to go back and he's the postman who's going to carry this letter of the Philippians back home and he's going to talk about him in the very letter that he's carrying back home.

[27 : 43] And sometimes, wounded soldiers with physical and emotional scars return home to a deafening silence. Sometimes our missionaries come home to a deafening silence.

Many years ago, when I was a missionary, having come home, I heard a Christian counselor, a doctor, a missionary for 30 years called Marjorie Foyle and she wrote a remarkable book.

I was just looking on the internet and it's been reissued. It was first published in 1987. The book is called Honorably Wounded and she talks about those in Christian service, not just missionaries, but in Christian service who've been hurt and scarred sometimes by the experiences that they have encountered.

and she says, we should esteem them highly and care for them, not ignore them. Give them a warm welcome. Don't leave it until the funeral service.

I often take funeral service. I've got a file this big since I've been in Edinburgh, probably 200

funerals. And quite often when you describe someone at a funeral service, people say, I wish he or she could have heard that.

[28 : 56] And there is a place to honour one another, to esteem people, just to express our appreciation. It's good that you've prayed already for your team who are going to join you here.

I'll keep praying for them. Keep appreciating them. Don't end up a certain person when we came to Charlotte Chapel. It's a kind of cultural thing said, don't expect anyone to thank you for anything here.

Just assume you're doing fine, otherwise we'll let you know. It wasn't always like that. It's improved over the years, but be careful.

So here we have Timothy the soulmate, Epaphroditus the risk taker. And after this, there's Paul himself. He doesn't explicitly mention, but he's part of that same fraternity, how he relates to these men and how he relates to the church in Philippi, which shows that he practices what he preaches and he feels what they feel.

He feels the same kind of anguish and sorrow. You see that emotional intensity in Paul, which you don't sometimes see in other places. In the Bible speaks today, commentary on Philippians.

[30 : 08] If you're following this series, it's one of the best commentaries by Alec Matea. Quite straightforward. He says, What Paul was inspired to imply about himself and to state concerning the other two reveals them as men who have taken the example of the Lord seriously.

He goes on, The Lord so consecrated himself in obedient service to God that he poured himself out for the benefit of others. They so consecrated themselves to God that self was subdued in the service of other Christians.

And here's a key phrase, The Lord is the Christian's model. They are model Christians. They are model Christians. So I'm nearly through, but let me finish with two questions.

Question one. Am I a model Christian? Now I know what most of us say in this circumstance.

If I came to you and said, Are you a model Christian? You would say, Oh, don't follow me. Follow Christ. Paul says, Follow me as I follow Christ.

[31 : 18] Am I a model Christian? I don't mean, Yeah, I'm a perfect Christian. You want to see the best example of perfection. Here I am. No, but am I walking in the way of Christ?

Am I following Christ? Am I serving Christ? Am I living other people? This is a very practical section, isn't it? If not, if against a dark background, you are indistinguishable from anyone else.

If someone was told me, a Christian said, I've just discovered that someone in my work is a Christian and then I never would have guessed. That's pretty scary, isn't it?

That gets about you? If we are indistinguishable, maybe some of us here this morning, maybe one or two of us, I don't know. Second question is, am I a Christian?

Because you see, if you've turned from your sin and put your faith in Christ, if God is at work in you by his spirit, then he should be producing the same kind of characteristics that we see in Timothy and Epaphroditus in Paul, those characteristics should be growing and increasing in Christ's likeness and if that's not the case, maybe this morning you need to put your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

[32 : 33] This is the challenge to us all. The challenge we began with is to shine like stars in the universe. I'm going to finish with a prayer.

Now, this is an interesting prayer. This is a prayer by John Wesley, founder of Methodism. I would hate you me saying that. My father's family are all from a Methodist background.

I began preaching as a young man in Methodist churches and they have a covenant prayer that they use to renew their covenant before God. I'm going to read the words of it.

It's quite a sobering prayer. We're going to use it as a final prayer before I hand back to Ian for a final song. I'll put the words on the screen because I think it's important that you see what you're going to pray if you want to say Amen at the end of it.

We could all stand up and say it together but maybe that's... Let's just read it. Okay, here's it. Read it slowly. Lord, I am no longer my own but yours.

[33 : 36] Put me to what you will. Rank me with whom you will. Put me to doing. Put me to suffering. Let me be employed for you or laid aside for you.

Exalted for you or brought lobe for you. Let me be full. Let me be empty. Let me have all things.

Let me have nothing. I freely and wholeheartedly yield all things to your pleasure and disposal. And now, glorious and blessed God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, you are mine and I am yours.

So be it. And the covenant now made on earth, let it be ratified in heaven. Amen. Amen.

Amen.