

Philippians 2:19-30
Be Church to Your Neighbor

Main idea: Jesus left His home in heaven in order to love His neighbor, which is you.

This morning, we're going to be talking about being the church to your neighbor.

Before ethical guidelines were established for the use of animals in research, researcher Martin Seligman and his colleagues conducted an experiment in the 1960's to see if they could train dogs to ignore pain. So they put a dog in a cage, closed the door, and began to give it electric shocks. At first, the dog would whine in pain, but eventually it came to expect the pain enough to tolerate it. After a little while, they opened the door of the cage, and continued giving the dog the shocks. Do you know what the dog did? It stayed in the cage. It could no longer distinguish between shocks and no shocks, and didn't realize that if it left the cage, it would be free from the pain inflicted on it. The researchers called it "learned helplessness," because the dogs came to expect that pain was just the way of life.

But then the researchers did something else. They put another dog in the cage with the first, and left the door open. And then they proceeded to shock both dogs. What do you think the second dog did when it got its first shock? He ran out yelling. And then what did the first dog do? He ran out after the other!

Here's the thing: we need people around us to help us to realize just how bad our circumstances are who will show us the way out.¹ That's part of what it is to be church to your neighbor. It's loving your neighbor enough to share the truth of God's word with them, so that they might run to Jesus and be saved.²

Find in your Bible Philippians 2. We've been talking about how God doesn't just call us to come to church, but to be the church.

Often when we think about coming together as a church, we think about worshipping God, and rightly so. That's an expression of the first and greatest commandment, to love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind. But Jesus also said that the second is like it: to love your neighbor as yourself.³

In the context of coming to church, we often think about the first greatest commandment, but we forget the second. But I think that the Bible is clear that the second greatest commandment is also to be expressed in how we gather as a church,⁴ and so I wonder if maybe the reason so many people don't have a favorable view of the church is simply because we often fail to love our neighbor as ourselves.

And Jesus made it clear that your neighbor isn't just the person who lives next door. Your neighbor is anyone who you meet who's in need, who you have an opportunity to love.⁵

So look at the people around you right now. Tell the person next to you, "Hello, neighbor." Now think about how you can love them. How can you love your neighbor, as yourself?

Philippians 2:19.

¹ Romans 10:14-15

² Matthew 5:16

³ Matthew 22:37-39

⁴ John 13:34-35

⁵ Luke 10:33-37

I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, so that I too may be cheered by news of you. For I have no one like him, who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare. (Philippians 2:19-20)

The church of Philippi saw Paul as a type of father figure, because as we saw in the first message in this series, Paul and his missionary team were instrumental in the church's beginning.⁶ When they went to Philippi, Paul shared the gospel with a woman named Lydia, and when she received Jesus and was baptized along with her family, the church of Philippi was started in her home. Paul and his team then taught in her home, and encouraged the new believers there.⁷ So when Paul wrote to the Philippian church, he was writing to friends, family, and neighbors.

[Mr. Roger's Theme Song]

It's a beautiful day in the neighborhood
A beautiful day for a neighbor
Would you be mine?
Could you be mine?

It's a neighborly day in this beauty wood
A neighborly day for a beauty
Would you be mine?
Could you be mine?

I have always wanted to have a neighbor just like you
I've always wanted to live in a neighborhood with you

Let's make the most of this beautiful day
Since we're together, I might as well say
Would you be my, could you be my
Won't you be my neighbor?

Hello, neighbor.

I love how Mr. Rogers would always speak directly through the television, to each person watching. And I think everyone who ever watched Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood, even though none of us lived anywhere near Mr. Rogers, we knew exactly what Mr. Rogers meant when he called us his neighbor. He meant: I love you.

And not at all coincidentally, since Mr. Rogers was an ordained minister, the Bible encourages us to think the very same thing of our neighbors. So, church, let's make the most of this beautiful day. I think, according to the Bible, it's always a beautiful day for a neighbor. Galatians 5:14 says:

For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." (Galatians 5:14)

And Romans 13:10 says this:

Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law. (Romans 13:10)

⁶ Acts 16:11-15. See the message: <https://graceisgood.org/sermons/birth-church-and-death-me/>

⁷ Acts 16:40

And when you read Paul's letter to the Philippians, you get the sense that Paul loved them as a father loved his children.⁸ In verse 19, he mentions sending Timothy to them to receive news about them, so that he could be cheered up by hearing about them.

And maybe even more so, Paul was like a father to Timothy. He was Timothy's mentor and friend.⁹ They shared the same values and purpose. And so when it came to the church of Philippi, whom Paul loved, Paul knew that Timothy would also be genuinely concerned for their welfare.

How much are you genuinely concerned for the welfare of your church? Or how about the welfare of your neighbor? Are you more concerned about what you can get from them, or about how you can bless them?

You know, the term welfare often has negative connotations in our society. But at its root, all we're really saying is that we should care about people. That we should love our neighbor. We don't want people, who are all made in the image of God, to starve, or to be miserable.¹⁰ We want to make sure people have what they need to survive, and even to thrive. And when we talk about welfare in light of God, we should see that everything we have is a gift from Him.¹¹ Therefore, be generous with what God has given you.¹²

I saw this picture several years back.

[Cartoon of beggar with mirror]



It's a picture of a beggar holding up a mirror to the person he's begging from. When I first saw this picture, I laughed, but then it made me think: would I give to myself if I saw myself begging on the street? Based on your previous record of giving to others when they ask you, would you even give to yourself if you were in need? Jesus said to love your neighbor *as yourself*. So if you were begging from you, would you even give to you?

But maybe you don't see very many beggars in your daily life. But I bet most of us know of a family member or friend who could use a little help. And maybe they don't even need financial help, but they need someone to watch their kids once a week so they can take a breath. Or maybe they just need a reminder that you love them and a ride to church.

⁸ Philippians 1:3-8

⁹ 2 Timothy 1:3-5

¹⁰ 1 John 4:20

¹¹ James 1:17

¹² 1 Timothy 6:17-19

Sometimes the ways God would have us give to others are so incredibly obvious and simple that we neglect to do them because we wonder how much they're really needed.¹³ But to the single mom who's struggling to raise her kids right and doesn't feel like what she's doing is working or appreciated, it can mean the world to her for you to simply take her out for lunch and pray for her. And maybe she never even asks for help, but you notice from her whole life that she's begging to be shown Christ's love.

Jesus said in Matthew 5:42:

Give to the one who begs from you, and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you. (Matthew 5:42)

Now, I'm not saying we should always give money, because we all know how that can be abused, but we ought also not harden our hearts so that we refuse to give anything.¹⁴ As I've shared before, we often have homeless bags in our vehicles that simply contain a bottle of water, a couple snacks, and a New Testament, because what people really need more than anything else is hope. And God forbid that we ever become stingy with the hope that we have.¹⁵ Instead, freely you have received, so freely give.¹⁶

And the reason that Paul writes to be generous toward others is utterly convicting. Verse 21.

For they all seek their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. (Philippians 2:21)

I love our monthly breakfasts. We have some amazing cooks in our church, so if you want a good big breakfast, you better be here every fourth Sunday of the month at 9 am. They are amazing.

A few months back, someone made an incredible breakfast casserole. After I finished my plate, I went to get seconds, and I noticed a few others who had just arrived who got in line behind me. My first mistake was that I should have let them cut in front of me, because I had already had one plate of food. But I wanted more of that casserole! So I said "hi" and then proceeded to find the casserole that I wanted. But there was only one piece left! So I could have said, "Hey you have to try this casserole, it's so good!" But instead, I quickly grabbed the spatula and got the last piece of the casserole for myself! And it was so good.

Now, there was plenty of other food to choose from, so the people behind me weren't going to go hungry, and yet this story does say something about my heart. I was seeking my own interests. Whenever you grab the last donut even when you've already had enough breakfast, or even if you just use the last of the coffee creamer without asking others if they'd like it, you might be seeking your own interests, putting yourself first. And we've all done this, and even if it seems like such a small thing, it's another evidence that all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.¹⁷

In fact, Paul wrote of his own ministry partners that they all seek their own interests, and not those of Jesus Christ.

¹³ Matthew 25:35-40

¹⁴ Matthew 6:24

¹⁵ 1 Peter 3:15

¹⁶ Matthew 10:8

¹⁷ Romans 3:23

With the exception of Timothy, nearly all of Paul's companions, basically all of the other Christians and ministers and missionaries that served with him, Paul said of all of them that they all put themselves first, and didn't seek to put Jesus first.

But did you catch what made Timothy different? Timothy was different because he was genuinely concerned about his neighbor's welfare. Paul seems to be saying that unless you genuinely love the church, unless you genuinely love others, and not just with your heart, but with your actions, then you're not really interested in serving Jesus.

I don't know about you, but that's convicting to me. So often, I'm more concerned with my bottom line rather than that of my neighbor. And Paul's saying that when I think and act that way, then that shows that I'm more interested in my interests rather than Jesus's interests. Paul is saying that it's Jesus's interest that you love your neighbor.

Verse 22.

But you know Timothy's proven worth, how as a son with a father he has served with me in the gospel. I hope therefore to send him just as soon as I see how it will go with me, and I trust in the Lord that shortly I myself will come also. (Philippians 2:22-24)

Now, here's a major aspect of being concerned about another's welfare that we often completely neglect in our daily lives. Christian welfare is more than taking care of physical needs. It's serving in the gospel. It's sharing Jesus.¹⁸ It's sharing your own life, even your most personal beliefs, your faith in Jesus, so that the people you serve would have no doubt that you love them.¹⁹

That's what Paul and Timothy did for one another. Paul loved and trusted Timothy so much that he was able to let him go. In the same way, we ought to raise and train up the next generation and then send them out to love and bless our world.²⁰ And one of the most important ways that we can love our neighbor is to take the gospel to them.²¹ Everytime you send your youth on a mission trip, you do this. Everytime your children go into the workforce not merely to make a living, but to represent Jesus, they do this. But don't just be content with watching your kids do this. Paul said that he himself hoped to join Timothy back on the mission field.

Abby and I are already trying to plan our retirement. We're considering things like being short-term winter missionaries in Mexico, Haiti, or China. Not northern China, where it's cold, but southern China where it's warm. We want to go somewhere to serve and share the gospel with people who desperately need to hear the good news. You see, biblical retirement isn't sitting around and doing nothing, but being freed up to possibly do even more for the sake of Christ.²²

So don't waste your retirement. Go on mission trips. Get trained in disaster relief. Visit the sick in nursing homes and hospitals. Bless others in a way that's only possible because of the freedom of not being tied to a work schedule. And do it all completely selflessly, because no one is paying you a dime. Do it all in service to Jesus Christ.²³

¹⁸ Matthew 28:19-20

¹⁹ 1 Thessalonians 2:8

²⁰ Proverbs 22:6

²¹ 1 Corinthians 9:19-23

²² Luke 12:16-21, Proverbs 6:6-8

²³ Galatians 1:10

Verse 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, for he has been longing for you all and has been distressed because you heard that he was ill. 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. I am the more eager to send him, therefore, that you may rejoice at seeing him again, and that I may be less anxious. So receive him in the Lord with all joy, and honor such men, for he nearly died for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete what was lacking in your service to me. (Philippians 2:25-30)

This passage talks about Epaphroditus, who was another fellow worker with Paul. Epaphroditus was the kind of Christian that just kept on keeping on. Even when he was sick, and near to death, he kept on serving Christ, and he did it with joy, just as Jesus pursued the cross for the joy set before Him.²⁴

As a church, we have the great honor of being full of joy because of God's mercy. Sometimes that means risking your life to serve God, but it also means rejoicing with your church family in God's deliverance. And as Christians, our family is larger than just our congregation. Our family is everyone who confesses Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.²⁵

That's how Paul could also send Epaphroditus to Philippi, and they would receive him as a brother.

You see, loving your church isn't a one-sided relationship. I hope you are blessed by your church. I hope that you come and enjoy the worship, and the fellowship, and the preaching. But being part of the church isn't all about what you can get out of it. Even while you're blessed, seek to be a blessing.²⁶ And if you've been a part of a church for awhile, and you don't really consider it to be a blessing, consider that it might be because you haven't been seeking to be a blessing to others. When you start to put the needs of others above yourself, you may just find the joy that you've been missing.

Epaphroditus's example challenges us to love serving others, even if it's in the face of death, but it wasn't because Epaphroditus was such a great Christian. Epaphroditus only lived that way because he was following the example of Christ. Jesus humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.²⁷ That's what Jesus endured to love His neighbor, which is you. Jesus is the good Samaritan who rescues you out of your brokenness and hopelessness. Jesus is the One who cares not for His own welfare, but for yours.

Jesus looks at you and says, "I have always wanted to have a neighbor just like you. I've always wanted to live in a neighborhood with you." So He came to the earth, lived among us, and died in our place in order to bring us God, that we might live with Him forever.

²⁴ Hebrews 12:2

²⁵ Matthew 16:18

²⁶ 1 Corinthians 14:26

²⁷ Philippians 2:9