

## Cruciform family dynamics

Philippians 2:19-3:1

By pastor Ken Keyte

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### 1

#### Philippians 2:19-3:1

<sup>19</sup> I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, that I also may be cheered when I receive news about you. <sup>20</sup> I have no one else like him, who takes a genuine interest in your welfare.

<sup>22</sup> 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. <sup>23</sup> I hope, therefore, to send him as soon as I see how things go with me. <sup>24</sup> And I am confident in the Lord that I myself will come soon.

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### 2

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<sup>25</sup> But I think it is necessary to send back to you Epaphroditus, my brother, fellow worker and fellow soldier, who is also your messenger, whom you sent to take care of my needs. <sup>26</sup> For he longs for all of you and is distressed because you heard he was ill.

<sup>27</sup> 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. <sup>28</sup>

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### 3

#### Philippians 2:19-3:1

<sup>28</sup> 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. <sup>29</sup> Welcome him in the Lord with great joy, and honor men like him, <sup>30</sup> because he almost died for the work of Christ, risking his life to make up for the help you could not give me.

<sup>3:1</sup> Finally, my brothers and sisters, rejoice in the Lord! It is no trouble for me to write the same things to you again, and it is a safeguard for you.

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Every Thursday morning, after Roy Hooton has helped the Craft cafe team get set up for the morning, he then meets me in my office to have kind of like a fatherly catch-up with me, to check how I'm doing, asking how Raewyn and our family are, and then he prays for me. I really appreciate it, because it gives me a sense of being cared for and looked after amidst the stresses and strains of pastoral ministry.

Last Thursday after we'd finished praying Roy said to me, "You know that word "cruciform" you've been using in your sermons lately, have you looked up what it means in the dictionary?"

I said, "No I haven't."

"When I looked up "cruciform" in the dictionary it said "*having the shape of the cross.*"

"Is that what you mean Ken, when you use the word "cruciform"? That our life is supposed to be in the shape of the cross?"

"Well, not literally in the shape of a cross", I replied, "but yes, how we live is meant to resemble the pattern of Jesus in going to the cross and then rising from the dead."

"Well that's a pretty good way of describing what being a Christian is, then isn't!," said Roy.

"Phew!, "I thought for a second you were going to *tell me I shouldn't be using an unbiblical word!*"

4



I asked Roy if I could *share that with you* this morning, because the *Oxford dictionary* definition for "cruciform"- which is "*having the shape of the cross*", is *exactly* what this preaching series is all about.

As we've been finding out from Paul's letter to the church in Philippi, *living a life worthy of the gospel of Christ* (as he puts it) is all about *living our life in the shape of the cross*.

This morning we're going to be looking at what Paul says in the passage I've just read, about *cruciform family dynamics*. **4a**

We're going to see how *cruciform family dynamics are exemplified in the relationships between Timothy and Epaphroditus, in the way they relate to the Philippian church, and to Paul.*

***Sending our best to where the need is most***  
-from our "father & son"-like partnerships

5



***Sending our best to where the need is most*** from our "father & son"-like relationships

'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.' (Phil. 2:22)

Here's a quick *catch up* on the *situation* that Paul found himself in that *prompted him to write this letter* to the church in *Philippi*.

Paul is *in prison*. Although we can't be certain about *where* or *why*, the *best explanation* fitting the events in the *book of Acts*, is that Paul is *under house arrest* in *Rome* awaiting *trial* before the emperor, on charges of *false teaching against the Jewish law* and of *defiling the temple in Jerusalem by bringing Greeks into the holy place*.

Which is where the book of Acts *ends off*.  
And quite possibly where Paul's letter to the Philippians *begins*.

Paul's letter to the Philippians gives us an *inside view* of what Paul *got up to* while he was under house arrest.

He writes that what has happened to him has actually *helped to spread the gospel* because he's shared it with all of the *imperial guards!* And this letter shows how he was able to *continue pastoring the churches* he'd planted, even though it was from a distance.

Which he did by *receiving news* from *messengers* sent from the churches,  
and by *sending letters back* to them with *pastoral instructions* about what was going on in their church.

Philippians is one of these *prison letters* from Paul, and in it he's *addressing his concern* that they should *be living their lives in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ*. (Phil. 1:27)

So at this point that we're up to in his letter, we *meet a couple of key people* in the *relational dynamics* between *Paul* and the *church of Philippi*.

The first of these is *Timothy*, whom Paul describes as being "*like a son*" to him in the way they've worked together in a "*father & son*"-like *partnership* for the *gospel*.

5a

It's this "*father & son*"-like *partnership* between *Paul & Timothy* that I want to *bring to your attention* as a *cruciform family dynamic* of *church*.

Now we're all familiar with *father & son partnerships* aren't we. They would've been far more common back in these *Graeco-Roman times*, when *tradesmen & businessmen* *trained up their sons* as *apprentices* in the *family business* so they could become partners in it and eventually pass the business on to their sons.

We have a *couple of examples* I can think of, of *father & son businesses* in our church.

Their business name used to be *Colin Olesen Accountants* but it's recently been changed to *Olesens Accountants* when Colin's son *Hamish* (who used to work as an associate for his father) but is now a fully-fledged partner in their family accountancy business.

Another example is *Ken and Paul Edkins*.

Ken's son *Paul*, works for him as his *orchard manager*, for their *Pukehina Orchard development*.

I imagine that the *training up and passing on* of *sound accounting and orcharding practices* from *father to son* has been an important part of these father and son partnership dynamics.

Just as the *training up and passing on* of *sound Christ-like practices* had been for Paul as he *worked alongside Timothy*, developing him in the '*family business*' (so-to-speak) of working for the gospel of Christ.

Although *Timothy* was just a *young man*, Paul had *great confidence* in Timothy's ability to *live in a manner worthy of the gospel by practicing cruciform: faith, love, power and hope*.

Which is why Paul was going to *send Timothy to Philippi*, as soon as Paul knew the verdict of his trial.

You see Timothy was the *product of a "father & son"-like apprenticeship* that I think would have *something in common* with the development processes *Hamish Olesen* and *Paul Edkins* have been through as they've *worked alongside* their Dads.

Yet there's something *distinctively different* about *this "father & son"-like partnership* between *Timothy and Paul*. Because, it's a *cruciform (cross shaped) "father & son"-like partnership* that Paul had been developing in Timothy as they'd worked together for the gospel of Christ.

Here's how we see this cruciform dynamic in Paul's decision to *send Timothy to Philippi*- instead of *keeping him there* as his helper while a prisoner in Rome.

You'll remember (I hope) that in the pattern of the Christ-hymn (in Phil 2:6-11), there are *four cruciform practices of Christ*:

- *Cruciform faith*: which is the faithful obedience to God that Jesus practiced in going to the cross.
- *Cruciform love*: which is the voluntary self-giving regard for others that Jesus also practiced in going to the cross

- *Cruciform power*: which is paradoxical life giving suffering and transformative potency in weakness that Jesus practiced in being crucified.
- *Cruciform hope*- the pattern of reversal as a preview to resurrection and exaltation that was practiced when Jesus was exalted by God to the highest position of all.

Back then, if a father needed his son's help, it was expected that the son would *stay* and help his father take care of business whether he wanted to or not.

But although Paul was like *a father to Timothy* and *needed* his help & care while in prison, *yet* Paul had decided *not* to benefit from his help but to *send Timothy* to Philippi, so *they* would benefit from his *help & care* instead!

He was *sending his best* to where the *need was most* from his father & son relationship with Timothy. **5b**

That's the *pattern of cruciform love* being practiced through the *family dynamics* of Paul and Timothy's "*father & son*"-like *partnership* for the gospel.

So what might this look like in practice *for us*?

An example of this is in our sending *Ilkka and Maree Rauhala* as missionaries to Kalesen Thailand.

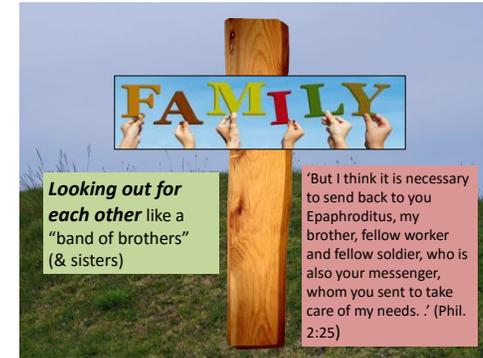
We could say in a similar manner to Paul, that: although Maree has helped us as a church with her exceptional administration skills, *yet* we have chosen *not* to try and keep her here for our own benefit, but will *send* her and Ilkka to Thailand *instead* so that the *churches of Kalasen* may benefit from Maree's administration skills and Ilkka's pastoral care.

We practice this cruciform family dynamic by *sending our best* to where the *need is most*, from the "father-son"-like (or "mother & daughter"-like partnerships in which they've been trained.

## Looking out for each other

- like a "band of brothers" (& sisters)

6



But Timothy wasn't the *only one* Paul was *sending back to Philippi* to help them live in a manner worthy of the gospel by practicing cruciform faith, love, power and hope.

Paul was sending back Epaphroditus *as well*, whom he describes as "*my brother, co-worker, and fellow soldier, and your messenger and minister to my need.*" **6a**

The reason *Epaphroditus* was with Paul was *this*:

When the Philippians had heard that Paul was *under house arrest in Rome*, and that the Roman church *weren't caring for him* like they should (remember the only way you got fed in a Roman prison was by your family and friends!). So they decided to *send one of their best* to where the *need was most* - to the *prisoner Paul*.

But things *hadn't gone as planned* for Epaphroditus! On the long journey from Philippi to Rome, he'd *gotten so sick* he'd almost *died*, but *thankfully*, by the grace of God, and to Paul's great relief, Epaphroditus had *recovered*.

However, the *traumatic experience* had left him *distressed* because *by now* news would have reached the Philippians about his illness, but there was no way of letting them know he was now better, unless someone went back to tell them.

So Paul had made the decision to *send Epaphroditus back immediately* (with Paul's letter to them), so they could see for themselves that *Epaphroditus was OK*.

Then as soon as Paul knew how things would go for his trial, he'd send Timothy to them as well. then, *all going well*, Paul hoped *he'd* eventually be able to head for Philippi *too!*

In the *sending* of Epaphroditus *from* Philippi to Paul (in Rome), and in the *returning* of Epaphroditus *from* Paul (in Rome) to Philippi, followed by the *sending* of Timothy from Paul (in Rome) to Philippi we see yet *another* cruciform family dynamic being practiced by the church:

A church *looks out for each other like a band of "brothers" (and sisters)*. **6b**

You see, the *Philippians* were *looking out for Paul* by sending *Epaphroditus* to Paul (in Rome), *Paul* was *looking out for Epaphroditus* and the *Philippians* by *returning* Epaphroditus to *Philippi*. Paul was also *looking out for the Philippians* by sending his *very best coworker* Timothy to minister to them too. And eventually by going there himself (if he ever got out of jail), the Philippian church would have received *not just one* but *three* of the *very best representatives of living in a manner worthy of the gospel by practicing cruciform faith, love, power and hope!*

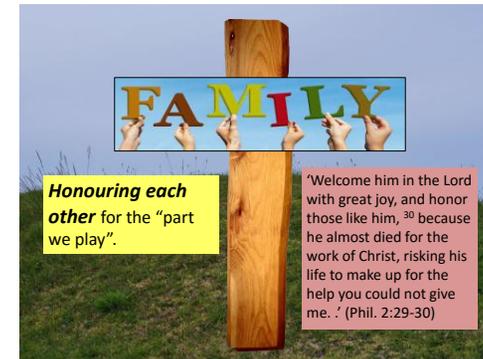
What might this look like for us?

Well in sending a couple of *our very best to Tanna* (Gary Scoggins and Mark Minchington) to *look out for their needs* of a reliable water supply after cyclone Pam, I reckon that's a pretty good example of *looking out for each other like a "band of brothers" (and sisters)*.

Yet *just as important*, as looking out for the needs of others (whether overseas or here), *Timothy, Epaphroditus and Paul* all show us, that we're also to be *representatives who live in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ by practicing cruciform: faith, love, power and hope!*

**Honouring each other**  
- for the "part we play"

7



However, in sending Epaphroditus back so soon, Paul was *taking a risk* that the Philippians *might think* Epaphroditus was *in disgrace* for *not* being able to stay & help Paul for as long as had been originally intended .

So Paul makes *special mention* that Epaphroditus *is* to be *welcomed and honoured* (as are others like him) who've *risked their life* for the work of Christ. **7a**

Because *even though* he'd gone home *sooner than expected*, he'd *still completed the job* he'd been sent to do for Paul, so they should *welcome him home with great honour and joy!*

Whether someone should be *honoured for a job well done*, or *disgraced for a job half finished* often comes down to how you look at it.

Paul was ever the "*cup always full*" kind of man. Sure he could've done with Epaphroditus's help for a bit longer in Rome...

But he'd *survived the long journey* from Philippi, *delivered important news* about the church, and the *much needed funds* so Paul could be fed and cared for in prison.

And now Paul wanted him *back in Philippi* to deliver his letter to them and *just as importantly* to be a *living example* for them of how to *live in a manner worthy of the gospel with cruciform: faith, love, power and hope!*

Paul might even be adding a *spark of humour* at this point in his letter because the Greek name "*Epahroditus*" means '*favoured son of Apaphrodite- the goddess of gambling*'.

So when Paul says how Epaphroditus "*risked his life*" he may well be *punning* his name by saying *Ephaphroditus* (*favoured son of Apaphrodite-the goddess of gambling*) is worthy of honour because he's *gambed his life for me and won!*

Like *God did of Jesus after going to the cross*, whenever we *honour each other* for the *part we play in God's service* (no matter how big or small) we *practice the cruciform family dynamic of exalting those who serve the Lord!*

### **Showing a range of emotions together**

- as a "real family" in the Lord

8



Something that *struck an emotional chord with me* as I read this passage, was the *depth of feeling* Paul displays for *his co-workers Timothy and Epaphrodite*, and the *range of emotions* Paul says *he and they* have experienced and *will go through* as the events described in his letter unfold.

Paul wants to be *cheered up* by news of the Philippians once Timothy returns from visiting. Indicating that Paul must've been feeling *despondent* after hearing disappointing news from Epahroditus about how the church was going.

Paul says, Timothy is genuinely *concerned* for their well being.

And he writes that Epaphroditus is *homesick*- longing to return to them and is *distressed* because they'd heard he was ill.

Paul expresses *relief* from being spared *sorrow upon sorrow* if Epaphroditus had died.

He says he's *eager* to send him back so they can *rejoice* at seeing him again and so his *anxiety* about him will be eased.

And after welcoming Epaphroditus home with *joy*, Paul writes, "finally my brothers and sisters *rejoice* in the Lord!"

So in just a couple of paragraphs Paul has expressed emotions of: *cheer, despondency, concern, homesickness, distress, relief, sorrow, eagerness, rejoicing, anxiety, and joy!*

These are the kinds of emotions most families experience in the highs and lows of life.

Members of our family have experienced most of these emotions and more over the last 12 months, and I don't think we're any different from any other family in the church!

So it would be a *big mistake* for us to think that *our church family* is a place for only *happy emotions* to be experienced and displayed!

Because *just like real families* experience a *range of emotions* as they go through life together,  
*real church families do too!*

So may we be a church of *cruciform family dynamics*:

- *Sending our best where the needs are most* - from the "father & son-like" and "mother & daughter"-like partnerships in which they've been trained.
- *Looking out for each other* like a "*band of brothers & sisters*"
- *honouring each other for the parts we play* (no matter how big or small!).
- *And experiencing the full range of emotions* together as a "*real family*" in the Lord!!!

Because this these are the dynamics of living as a church family,  
*in the shape of the cross!*