

Sermon
Lanier Christian Church
February 5, 2012

The Joy of Developing A Godly Character Philippians 2:19-30

I have said it last week – but let me say it again:

God is more concerned with your character than He is with your comfort.

God is more concerned with your holiness than He is with your happiness.

God is more concerned with you as a person than He is with your possessions.

God is getting you ready – to live with Him forever. He is getting you ready to accept His inheritance. Your possessions will not go with you – but your character – your holiness – who you are as a person is important to God. Why? Because if you are a Christian – you will live in God's Kingdom – forever and ever and ever. You see:

God is more concerned with your character than He is with your comfort – it is your character that will last forever. It is **who** you are as a person that counts.

We live in a world that puts a lot of emphasis on possessions or popularity. How much money does a person have? Is he or she famous? How much power or authority do they carry? God asks questions like: Is the person holy? Is he or she seeking to follow me? Are they really striving to be a Godly person? Are you? Do you strive to be more like the One who laid down His life for you? Are you striving to be more like Jesus? You see:

God is more concerned with your character than He is with your comfort.

He is more concerned with your holiness than He is with your happiness.

He is more concerned with you as a person than He is with your possessions.

Today I want us to look at five Godly characteristics that I believe every Christian should strive for. As we begin let's read our focal verse for today. We have been going through a series on Philipians – so look at Philipians 2:19-30

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. 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. 22 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. 23 I hope, therefore, to send him as soon as I see how things go with me. 24 And I am confident in the Lord that I myself will come soon. 25 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. 26 For he longs for all of you and is distressed because you heard he was ill. 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. 28 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. 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.*

“But I trust in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you shortly, that I also may be encouraged when I know your state. For I have no one like-minded, who will sincerely care for your state. For all seek their own, not the things which are of Christ Jesus. But you know his proven character, that as a son with his father he served with me in the gospel. Therefore I hope to send him at once, as soon as I see how it goes with me. But I trust in the Lord that I myself shall also come shortly. Yet I considered it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother, fellow worker, and fellow soldier, but your

messenger and the one who ministered to my need; since he was longing for you all, and was distressed because you had heard that he was sick. For indeed he was sick almost unto death; but God had mercy on him, and not only on him but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow. Therefore I sent him the more eagerly, that when you see him again you may rejoice, and I may be less sorrowful. Receive him therefore in the Lord with all gladness, and hold such men in esteem; because for the work of Christ he came close to death, not regarding his life, to supply what was lacking in your service toward me." Philippians 2:19-30 (NKJV)

In this passage of scripture Paul gives us two examples of people with Godly character. He speaks of Timothy and Epaphroditus.

Paul says of Timothy: *"you know that Timothy has proved himself."* *"you know his proven character"* it says in the New King James Version. Of Epaphroditus he says: *Welcome him in the Lord with great joy, and honor men like him, because he almost died for the work of Christ, risking his life.* Clearly both men, in Paul's estimation, were people of Godly character. So...

WHAT KIND OF GODLY CHARACTERISTICS IS GOD LOOKING FOR IN A PERSON?

1. COMPASSION

God is looking for people who care about people. Over the long haul relationships are more valuable than riches. The Bible says:

"If I give everything I own to the poor and even go to the stake to be burned as a martyr, but I don't love, I've gotten nowhere. So, no matter what I say, what I believe, and what I do, I'm bankrupt without love." 1 Corinthians 13:3 (MSG)

You can be a success in everything else but if you don't have love in your life you're a failure. God is looking for people of compassion.

Compassion is protecting the needs and rights of people. Too often

we're just living life for ourselves, not caring what other people need or want. Look at what Paul says of Timothy in verses twenty and twenty one. This is from the Message Bible:

"I have no one quite like Timothy. He is loyal, and genuinely concerned for you. Most people around here are looking out for themselves, with little concern for the things of Jesus." Philipians 2:20-21 (MSG)

Paul says Timothy has genuine care for people. He is not just looking out for his own interests – he is looking out for their spiritual welfare too – he has compassion.

Is it possible to get so wrapped up and committed to your own business that you forget your family and those in need? Of course it is. But God expects us to be concerned about the needs of others.

A great example of a person of compassion is the Good Samaritan in the gospel of Luke. He was on a business trip from Jerusalem to Jericho. Along the road he finds somebody who is mugged, beaten and just left at the side of the road. The Samaritan stops and administers first aid. He takes the injured man down to the local Holiday Inn Express – leaves his credit card number and says: "Charge whatever is needed to my account. I'll be back in a couple days to settle up. Take good care of him."

The Good Samaritan has compassion for a total stranger. Would you or I do that for a stranger? God is looking for people who care about people – who have a genuine concern for others.

2. CONSISTENCY

God is looking for a person who puts character before conformity. Who you are is more important than what you do. God is looking for people who are not afraid to be different from the culture around them and to stand up for godly standards. Paul is speaking about Timothy in verse twenty two when he says (Message version):

*"But you know yourselves that Timothy's the real thing. He's been a devoted son to me as together we've delivered the Message."
Philippians 2:22 (MSG)*

Timothy has "proven character" – he is "the real thing." He is a person of integrity. He is a person of honor. He is a person that God is looking for. Timothy's name means "he honors God." He did not cave in to the pressures around him.

It has been said, "If you don't stand for something, you will fall for anything." What are you willing to stand for? We need people of conviction. We need people who will not be bought at any price. They are committed to godly values – consistent in their beliefs and convictions. A person who is half committed to everything – is not committed at all. Proverbs chapter ten tells us:

"People with integrity walk safely, but those who follow crooked paths will slip and fall." Proverbs 10:9 (NLT)

The bottom line for a person of godly character – is integrity. A nice personality will make a good first impression – but success over the long haul is built on character – not on image. A person of integrity will not be afraid of what is going to be found out – they have nothing to hide. Is your private life consistent with your public image? Are you godly on Sunday but live like the devil the rest of the week? God is looking for people who are consistent in character – who strive to live a godly life all the time.

3. COOPERATION

God is looking for people who put cooperation before competition. Paul recognized that even he would get more accomplished if he worked together with other people. Follow along with me as I read verse twenty five:

*...Epaphroditus, my brother, fellow worker and fellow soldier,
Philippians 2:25-26 (NIV)*

Paul describes the cooperation he has with Epaphroditus in with

three terms that emphasize relationship – “my brother, fellow worker, and fellow soldier.”

In this verse we see three things about the Christian life:

1. It is about family – we are related. If you know Jesus Christ as your savior – God is your Father – I am your brother – and the church is your family. Over one hundred and thirty times in the New Testament – Paul uses the word "brother" to describe the relationship between believer – we are family.
2. It is a fellowship – we hold something in common. We are headed to the same destination. We have the same task. We have been given the Great Commission. We are to serve together – work together – to accomplish God’s mission. We are in the same boat – sinners who have received grace and mercy from God – commissioned to tell others how they can receive grace and mercy too.
3. It is a fight. When you became a Christian you became an enemy of Satan. You are in a battle. It is a spiritual battle. We are to defend each other and protect each other and support each other. We are to care for one another – life is a battle. Our enemy is the devil. That is why Paul says in Ephesians:

11 Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. 12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. - Ephesians 6:11-12 (NIV)

Can other people see these relationships in your life? Do you treat fellow believers as family – as fellow soldiers – as ones you have fellowship with? Do you have special relationships with fellow believers? God wants you to cooperate with other believers. Do others know you’re in a battle against the evil one and they are willing to stand alongside you? There is no such thing as “lone ranger” Christians in God’s kingdom. Cooperation is key.

4. COMMITMENT

God is looking for people who put commitment before comfort. Paul says of Epaphroditus in verse 30:

he almost died for the work of Christ, risking his life to make up for the help you could not give me. - Philippians 2:30

I meet many people who are great starters – but not so great at finishing. More people start a race than finish it. Many people start a project – but never see it to completion – they just never finish. They quit because it becomes inconvenient or expensive – uncomfortable or requires too much effort. The Christian life is not cheap – it costs. Jesus said it this way:

"No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God" - Luke 9:62

He also said:

"Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head." Luke 9:58

God is looking for those who are willing to pay the price. The Christian life is costly – but well worth the effort – but it takes commitment.

5. COURAGE

God is looking for people who will put service before security. God is looking for people who will step up for godly values – no matter what the cost.

Today's value system says: "Do whatever it takes to take care of yourself – watch out for your own security. " Security becomes the goal of life rather than service. Jesus said:

31 *So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' 32 For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. 33 But*

seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. - Matthew 6:31-33

God is looking for people with courage – who are willing to stand up for the kingdom of God and move ahead with great faith.

Epaphroditus risked his life and almost died for the work of Christ to make up for the help the Philippians could not give to Paul. He was willing to gamble everything for the gospel. Christians need to have courage when it comes to standing up for the things of God.

Paul says in the book of Romans:

1 Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship. 2 Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will. - Romans 12:1-2

Don't accept the world's standard for what is important in life. "Offer yourself" – stand up for the things of God. What godly things have you stood up for lately? Are you willing to give yourself – become a living sacrifice – for the cause of Christ? Are we people of courage – who are willing to stand up for the things of God? From time to time we sing the song – "Stand Up – Stand Up For Jesus" – but when the battle comes are we found sitting as a spectator? What are you willing to sacrifice for the cause of Christ? Paul said, "present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your worship before God." God wants His people to be godly – for you see:

God is more concerned with your character than He is with your comfort.