



Daily Devotionals

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PHILIPPIANS 2:25-30 HEART-FELT OBEDIENCE

Written by Rev. Dr. Charles D. (Chuck) Alley, Ph.D., Rector of St. Matthew's Episcopal Church, Richmond, Va.

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.

Following Jesus is not to be a matter of duty or formal imitation, but a matter of the heart. In both St. Paul's effusive description of Epaphroditus and the latter's attitude and actions being described, we see the heart of Christ. Although from very different backgrounds and diverse callings, they have grown into the likeness of Christ. The motivation for the Christian life is the love that is joyous with the joyful, sorrows with those who sorrow, compassionate with those in need, desires to promote the best in another and keeps the Lord constantly as the context for our thoughts, words and actions.

In the Church today, with our objectives, goals and strategies, we have constructed an ends-driven culture. We develop ways to be successful and promote as experts those who seem to have been successful in the area of our particular interest. We do need to learn from one another as we seek to walk in obedience to God, but we cannot afford to trade the model of Jesus' loving service to us for dutifully adhering to a human program. The marketing of such programs does not promote unity and cooperation, but rather breeds competition and separation. In addition, since the specific environment necessary for success does not exist everywhere, these programs often lead to disappointment and bitterness.

Jesus gave us no program or ritual by which we could be successful. Rather he gave us himself as an example of the way in which we are to live. As relationships defy being successfully codified, our life in Christ is to be a matter of character and attitude. Christianity is not about

adhering to a specific flow-sheet for living. Christian living is about being transformed by Jesus' Spirit into a person who loves like Jesus – both God and neighbor – in a manner that points not to oneself, but leads our neighbor to God.

Gracious Jesus, you have loved me with an unfathomable love. Replace my heart that has eyes only for myself with your heart of compassion and service to others. May I imitate you into not with my mind only but with my heart and my entire being. Transform me by your Spirit into an authentic and accurate witness to your saving love. Amen.

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