

Portraits of Faithful Servants

Philippians 2:19-30

The test of true servanthood is whether you will serve others even at significant personal cost.

LTS: Rom. 12:1-21

Please open your bibles with me to Philippians chapter 2:19

This morning I would like you to think about the person who has influenced you most in your journey toward spiritual maturity as a Christian. As you look back over the span of your life you can probably remember a hand full of people who really influenced you in significant ways toward Christ and a life that honors Him.

Perhaps it was your mother or father. Maybe it was that co-worker he led you to Christ, or your pastor, youth leader, or spouse. I assume you have been taught by sermons, books, and conferences, but I suspect the most powerful steps of growth came to you by the influence someone you know.

In my own life I think back to the influence of my grandfather when I was just a boy. He was the godliest man I had ever met, and his life was full of joy. He loved the word of God and studied it day and night. He was a firm disciplinarian, but always fair and gracious.

I remember the youth leader in my church as a teenager who was not afraid to call me out for my foolishness, and yet in every hardship he was there, bible in hand, instructing me in the things of the Lord.

In college it was Bill Petite, and my dear friend Jim Pittman who not only became my closest mentor and friend, but eventually became the pastor of Calvary Presbyterian Church Independent – which today is known as Calvary Bible Church. Yes, I remember a few sermons in my lifetime and a few lectures in seminary, but mostly the Holy Spirit used real people to offer the encouragement, correction and inspiration that I needed to strive for a greater love for Christ and greater maturity in Him.

Here in the book of Philippians as Paul is teaching Christian ethics and Christian character to the church of Philippi he understands that the best way to drive home

what they should become was NOT merely by abstract propositions and definitions but by living examples of godliness.

As prof Hendricks at Dallas Seminary used to say, “The Christian life is better caught than taught.” Puritan pastor, Thomas Brooks said, “Example is the most powerful rhetoric. “And that’s just another way of saying what was on the mind of the author of Pro. 27, who wrote, “As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another.”

Paul understands that its more powerful to teach the Christian life by modeling it than simply by talking about it. And that’s what Paul is attempting to do. He wants us to catch on to the secret of unified relationships in the church of Jesus Christ. And to do that, Paul offers four models of Christ-like living. Or we might say, Four models of sacrificial service.

The first model he sets before is Christ Himself.

Read 2:5-11

The Second model we discover in this text is the example of Paul himself. Witness how he offers himself as a model throughout the letter.

- Consider the fact that his circumstance is prison, and yet he never grumbles or complains about his personal hardships. Rather (1:12-13) he recognizes that his intensified suffering has created a greater opportunity for sharing the gospel with Roman soldiers.
- In fact, in the midst of his personal hardships he keeps saying (1:18-19) “I rejoice! Yes, and I will rejoice! Again (3:1) he commands them (3:1) to “Rejoice in the Lord!” And then (4:4) he declares, “Rejoice in the Lord always! Again, I will say, rejoice!” What was he doing? He was modeling for them how to apply God’s promises and commands in the nitty-gritty of life
- He also offers himself as a model of contentment. Famously, Paul writes (Read 4:11-13)

How do we know that Paul intends for us to see him as a model? How can you be sure I’m not just making this up? Well we know it because he explicitly says so (Read 3:17).

And this was common in Paul’s writing. He frequently exhorts believers to follow the pattern he sets forth by his own life. For example:

- (1 Cor. 4:16) “I urge you brethren, be imitators of me.”
- (1 Cor. 11:1) “Be imitators of me as I am of Christ.”
- (2 Thess. 3:7) “For you yourselves know how you ought to imitate

us...”

- 2 Thess. 3: 9 “We give you in ourselves an example to imitate.”
- And this is just a sample of such verses.

Imitation is a powerful tool both for good and for evil. Humans seem to be hard-wired to imitate those who have what we desire.

- Do you want to be cool? The man in this commercial is very cool, and look at the car he’s driving! If you had that car you would also be cool?
- Do want to be beautiful and attractive? This woman in this commercial is beautiful and attractive and notice the kind of shampoo she uses. If you used the shampoo she uses, you will be a beautiful and attractive too.
- Do you want a better career? The guy in this commercial has a great job and makes lots of money and notice the school he graduated from. If you graduate from his school, you can land that great career as well!

It sounds kind of silly when you say it like I just did, but the fact is, it works! Retailers make billions of dollars every year by advertising like this. It’s the power of imitation. And while imitation can be motivated by covetousness and greed, it can also be motivated by a desire to grow in Christ. And what Paul is touching on in these few verses is that one of the most powerful influences in our quest for godliness is the faithful model of godly people. (This is why I am committed to reading one significant biography per year and share it with you every January).

Now, as I said, the first model Paul offers is the ultimate example; namely, Jesus Himself. The second model Paul offers is his own life. And then we come to our text for this morning and we read of two other human examples whose lives are worthy of imitation. Lets read about them together.

Read Phil. 2:19-30

As you can see this passage is not your typical Pauline doctrinal treatise or word or correction to a drifting church. He doesn’t really tell us to do anything, nor does he hope to redirect our thinking toward worship or any of the typical things we would expect to find in other texts written by the apostle. Rather, what we find is a short interlude of administrative planning on the part of a faithful pastor for the people of the church he loves. He wants to make sure they know what is going on with him. He

knows intuitively that love requires communication so, he sets forth a plan to make sure they are adequately informed.

And we see Paul applying a common principle in pastoral ministry; namely, that people are more important than programs. You've got to know that Paul was chomping at the bit to get out of prison and back to the work of planting churches and spreading the gospel across the known world. And you've got to know that as soon as he is acquitted, he's going to burst through the gates like a wild race horse headed toward Asia Minor!

Nevertheless, Paul understands that he needs to be sensitive to the interests and feelings of the people who love him so much back in Philippi. He has learned, through a letter brought to him by Epaphroditus, that the brothers and sisters in Philippi are very concerned about what may happen to him at his final trial. Ultimately, they are really worried that he might be martyred! And Paul doesn't want to run roughshod over their concerns.

Not only that, but he is eager to learn news about them as well. Have they experienced persecution? Are they maintained their allegiance to Christ? Is unity in the body being preserved? Have Euodia and Syntyche begun reconciling with one another? Paul wants to alleviate their concerns about him (if possible) and he wants them to know that he is equally concerned about them. So, he comes up with a plan to send both Epaphroditus and Timothy (in that order) to the Philippians with something that many of you young people have never seen: a hand-written letter! This letter, which we call Philippians, will be carried by Epaphroditus, and then a second letter will be written carried there by Timothy.

Now, practically speaking, as we look over Paul's shoulder at the personal letter he is writing to the church of Philippi we can't help but notice that what arises out of these few words are two vivid portraits of Christ-like servants whose lives and ministries are worthy of imitation.

1. The exemplary life of Timothy:
2. The Exemplary life of Epaphroditus:

1. Now, the first model that Paul talks about is Timothy. Paul doesn't have to look far for the most qualified minister to send on this mission. Timothy is right there with him and there is no one more qualified for the task than he. So he writes (19) "I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon so that I too will be cheered by nes of you."

2. Now, the first few words of address here are of particular interest to me. Paul says, “I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you...”

- A. Notice, how He speaks of his plan to send Timothy. He says, “I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon...” I love that phrase. I was unaware of its significance before my study this week, but I know I’m going to use it in the future.
- B. What does Paul mean when he says, “I hope in the Lord to send Timothy”? He means: This is my fallible, dependent plan. He didn’t get a word from the Lord about what he should do. Jesus didn’t speak to him in a dream or give him a revelatory “impression” about what was going to happen next. The fact is, Paul didn’t know what was going to happen next, but he devised a plan anyway. It was a “fallible” plan because he (like we) was a sinner prone to making mistakes. It was a “dependent” plan because he knew that Jesus was providentially sovereign over every detail of his life even if it meant death.
- C. Consider this principle: Just because your plans are not certainties doesn’t mean you shouldn’t plan. Good stewardship requires us to make plans. We just need to hold them in an open hand and be content when God ordains what we don’t expect or desire. So rather than saying “the Lord told me,” why not just say “I hope in the Lord Jesus” to do this or that. In v. 23 he says, I hope therefore to send him...,” and again in v. 24 “I trust in the Lord that shortly I myself will come.” Paul’s hope was not in His ability to plan but in Christ’s sovereign Lordship over all his plans.

3. Nevertheless, what I really want us to see is the portrait of Timothy as the faithful, Christ-like servant. And what stands out to me most in this passage is that these two servants of Christ were willing to serve the Apostle and other people NOT merely when it was convenient but even when it involved hardship. The test of true servanthood is whether you will serve others even at significant personal cost. Timothy was just such a servant. First of all, he will willing to pay...

I. The Cost of Personal Humility:

1. Notice how Paul describes Timothy: (20) “For I have no one like him, who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare.”

2. Unfortunately, I think the ESV misses the sense of Paul's meaning here while the NASB gets it right. When Paul says, "For I have no one like him," the GK text actually says, "I have no one of like mind, (or kindred spirit). The word translated "like mind" means

- A common soul
- Having the same mind
- Like-minded
- It's the picture of two oxen harnessed to the same cart, pulling together in step with one another and exerting equal effort in the same direction.
- But you know, it's one thing for two dumb beasts to work together to pull a wagon but quite another for two intelligent, gifted, and independent humans to function with singleness of mind, maintaining a kindred spirit. That takes humility. That requires mutual respect and a willingness to rank one's self under the other.
- This goes beyond agreement on a doctrinal statement. It requires two people reign in their personal preferences and individual ambitions for the sake of service to Christ and others. No two people enjoy this kind of unity without personal cost. It doesn't magically happen when personal chemistry between people is just right. No! It happens when two people, in submission to Christ, obey the command (2:2) to "be of the same mind, having the same love, intent on one purpose."
- Timothy had proven himself to be just such a person. Yes, he was remarkably gifted. But he also had the humility that enabled him to be a team player with a willingness to do whatever Paul called on him to do for the sake of Christ and other people. He was a true servant because he was willing to serve even when it cost him.

3. On a personal level, can I ask you a penetrating question?

- Do you find it difficult to work with others?
- Have people in your life told you that it's hard to make plans and resolve problems with you?
- Do you find yourself frequently disagreeing and even arguing with others about relatively small matters?
- Do you find it difficult to have a kindred spirit with anyone than yourself?

- Perhaps the problem isn't everyone else. Perhaps it's you. Maybe you have been unwilling to pay the cost of personal humility.

4. Timothy was a faithful servant because he was willing to pay The Cost of Humility. Second, he was also willing to pay...

II. The Cost of Biblical Love:

1. Notice (2:20) Paul says, "I have no one else of kindred spirit who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare." In other Timothy knew that true love doesn't happen without cost. Perhaps it's because of cultural influences that even Christians fail to apprehend the true nature of biblical love. The world says: Love is a feeling that attracts me to you because you make me feel good. Being with you makes me happy and that's why I love you! The problem with that, of course, is that as soon as the other person fails to make you happy you will fall out of love with them.

2. I'm confident, however, that you know the bible well enough to understand God's view of love. "To love is to give what I have that you need because God wants me to." You see, genuine, Christ-like love will cost you. Think about what love for the Philippians was going to cost Timothy.

A. It would cost him personal comfort:

- Do you remember how many miles there were between Philippi and Rome? (800).
- And are you familiar with the available options for transportation in the 1st Century? (travel was on foot and by boat).
- Its not unreasonable to surmise, then, that personal service to the church of Philippi would cost him a month or more of travel with all of the requisite hardships and dangers.
- But isn't that the point? The cost of love often means that we give up our own interests in favor of the interests of others.
- What did the Philippians need? They needed to hear the emperor's decision about Paul? Had he been executed? Had he been released? These people Loved Paul. They feared for his life! They longed to see him again! They were afraid that his ministry to them and to the entire known world might suddenly be cut off. Perhaps more than any other church Paul planted, the Philippians needed news about Paul. But that news would not arrive in a timely manner unless someone was willing to

pay the price for their benefit.

- In reality, however, love required not only the hardships of personal ministry to the church of Philippi, but also the hardships involved in serving Paul. Notice (2:19b), “I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, so that I too may be cheered by news of you.”
- You see, Timothy’s mission involved NOT only the long hike to Philippi, but another long trip to meet up with Paul (wherever he might go after his release) to bring him news about the welfare of the church.
- Engaging in this kind of costly service may seem extravagant, but isn’t this how Jesus loved us? (2:6) “Though he existed in the form of God did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself by taking the form of a servant...” How much hardship do you think was involved when “The word became flesh” (John 1:14). “In this is love (1 Jn. 4:10), not that we love God but that He loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sin.”

- B. You see, those who are truly Christ-like servants are willing to pay the cost of love for others.
- C. And by the way, not every Christian is willing to engaging in such costly love. We should! We are commanded to! But many (perhaps most) never do. Why? (2:21) “For they all seek their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ.”
- D. Now, of course Paul may be speaking about the trouble-makers he mentioned earlier. But then again, he may be referring to the majority of believers he knew who were happy to stay home, read their bibles, attend small group, and enjoy a comfortable kind of Christian life that doesn’t involve any real sacrifice.
- E. But that wasn’t Timothy. The reason Timothy’s life is worthy of imitation is because he reflected the radical other’s-centeredness of Christ. He was willing to pay the cost of biblical love. He didn’t seek his own interests but rather the interests of Christ.

3. So, when Timothy shows up at the church door in Philippi instead of Paul, they will be missing out on NOTHING! It’s as if Paul is saying: Don’t be disappointed that I will not be able to come immediately to you upon my release. No one is more concerned about your welfare than Timothy. No one loves you more than Timothy. No

one is devoted to your needs and concerns than Timothy. He was willing to pay the cost of biblical love

4. So Timothy's life is worthy of imitation because it was marked by a willingness to pay the cost of personal humility. He willing to pay the cost of Biblical Love, and finally, He willing to pay...

IV. The Cost of Personal Integrity:

Read 2:22

1. You see, Timothy was no novice in ministry. In fact, by this time Timothy had served beside Paul for nearly a decade. And over the years Timothy earned a reputation to personal integrity. He was committed to the task. He was loyal and teachable. And even in the most difficult of circumstances was always standing at the ready.

2. Timothy knew what it meant to endure hardship. He was the faithful farmer who labored long and hard for the harvest. He was the loyal soldier he didn't get sidetracked in civilian affairs. He was the determined athlete he disciplined himself to play by the rules and was always ready for the next event.

3. Paul never had to wonder where Timothy was. All he had to do was cast his eyes to the line of scrimmage and Timothy is there standing at the line, helmet on, and one hand on the ground. When Paul needed someone to go, he would go (even it required 1,600 miles by foot). If he needed someone to stay in Ephesus, he stayed. He was there in Philippi when Paul and Silas were beaten and thrown in jail. He was there when, as a result of preaching Christ he was taken outside the city, stoned, and left for dead. And even now, as Paul is in prison, Timothy is there, in the game, making the sacrifices, paying the cost. He wasn't like John Mark who, when the going got tough he ran to momma. And even though he struggled with natural timidity and shyness, he never let those personal issues keep him from being faithful.

4. And even after Paul was eventually executed, Timothy remained faithful to the Lord and Christ's church. In Hebrews 13 the author ends his letter by announcing that Timothy had just been released from jail.

5. You see, no one gave Timothy his reputation. He earned every bit of it by his constant faithfulness to Paul and loyalty to Christ. In 1 Tim. 4:12 Paul admonished him to "Be an example for believers in speech, conduct, love, faith, and purity." He was for them, and he is for us.

6. Is your life worthy of imitation? Are you diligently associating with people who are mature than you are so that you can learn from their model of faithfulness? Are you willing to pay the cost to love and serve others?

The test of true servanthood is whether you will serve others even at significant personal cost.