

For a growing Christian life, we need examples. Christian character is as much caught as taught.¹ One of the main ways we learn to live Christianly is from more mature Christians. They teach us to pray, to interpret Scripture, to be a husband, wife, father, mother, to serve, to lead, to work. This is why we need the church. / The truth is that emulation is happening all the time whether we choose it or not. Models abound. And if you have kids or grandkids, you know this. Accents, language, body language, walking gait. It starts at a young age. The apple doesn't fall far from the tree.

This morning, we are back in Phil 2. If you are a guest with us, thank you for being here. We understand that looking for a church can be strange and difficult. One of the things we would want you to know about us is that the engine of this church is expositional preaching. That means most of the time we teach straight through books of the Bible. We have been in Philippians since August and will be there till May. **Phil 2:19-30** (922 This is).

In these verses this morning, in many ways, Paul is just sharing some of his friend's travel plans. We *could* just quickly skim past these logistics, but God has a word for us in them. Yes, it is a human writing to a human congregation, but Paul is not the only author. God the Holy Spirit is moving him to write what he writes so that the result is a "God-breathed" Text. As Paul relays his plans, we are given two concrete examples to learn from and imitate. These men are good examples of what it means to live a life worthy of the gospel. **3:17**.

But we should only imitate them as they imitate Christ. Paul says that in 1 Cor 11:1: imitate me as I imitate Christ. And of course, Paul has already pointed us to the example of Christ in **2:2-8**. Main point: imitate Timothy and Epaphroditus as they imitate Christ.

I. Imitate Timothy – 19-24 – Timothy was Paul's protégé, his son in the faith. Timothy co-authored Philippians, 2 Cor, 1-2 Thess, Col, and Philemon. He was with Paul in Rome. He was with Paul when he first visited Philippi. Paul says I have no one like him. Timothy was unique. **2 Tim 1:5, 3:10-17**. Moms, Grandmothers, never dare underestimate the importance and significance of discipling your kids and grandkids. Be like Lois and Eunice.

Timothy cares for the church's welfare. Genuinely. Truly. Timothy's interests are the church's interests and the church's interests are Timothy's interests. Timothy cares about her health and growth and protection. He's a churchman.

In this sense, he was a good disciple of Paul. Paul's main burden was for the health and flourishing of the church. He was genuinely concerned for the welfare of the church - **1:19-26**. So the Christ-centered life is the church-centered life. **Col 1:28-2:5**. / I can't help but point out the difference in 1st C church leader's concerns and modern church leader's concerns. Sadly, all too often, church leaders are consumed with quantitative growth. Bottom right. The killer B's: buildings, budgets, and butts in the seats. Nickels and noses. But Paul and Timothy care about their welfare, their spiritual growth, their maturation.

1:8-11. Gal 4:19: "my little children, for whom I am again in the anguish of childbirth until Christ is formed in you!" After listing out all his various sufferings like receiving 40 lashes minus 1 five times at the hand of the Jews, beaten with rods 3 times, stoned once, then shipwrecked three times, danger all around, then he says, "in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches."

¹ Carson, *Basics for Believers*, 69.

Daily pressure. Anxious for the wellbeing of the church. I have been praying this week, that he would increase among us a Godly anxiety for the sake of one another.

Notice that the parallel statements here. The church's welfare is equated to the interests of Jesus Christ. The interests of Jesus are the interests of the church. To serve Jesus is to serve the church. Look at **20-21** again. Let me paraphrase these two verses: Timothy is concerned with the church's interests, these haters are only concerned with their own interests, not the interests of Jesus.² In other words, to be concerned with the church is to be concerned with Jesus. And the opposite is to be concerned with the self.

Christians are those who have the mindset of Jesus, they put the church's interests before their own interests – **2:2-5**. Believers are not focused on self, they are focused on Christ, which looks like being focused on the church's good. The Christ-centered life is the church-centered life. Remember when the Lord knocks Saul off of his horse, he says, "Saul, Saul why are you persecuting my people? No, Saul, Saul why are you persecuting me. To persecute the church is to persecute Jesus. There is an organic connection between the body and the head. You don't disconnect the head from the body. There is no decapitated discipleship. **1 John 3:14, 4:20-21**.

As Paul put it at the end of chapter 1: to live is Christ, and that means fruitful labor for the progress and joy of the church. To live is Christ means working for the spiritual growth of Christians. The Christ-centered life is the church centered life. As one NT scholar puts it, "Genuine concern for the spiritual health of fellow believers is a tangible demonstration of Christ-like character."³

There are some who only have their own interests in mind - **1:15-17**. They are self-focused not Christ-focused which leads to being others-focused. They lacked what Mrs. White calls JOY: Jesus Others You. Envy, rivalry, selfish ambition. **2:2-5**.

Timothy is a tangible embodiment of the mindset of Jesus. Look to Timothy and emulate his concern for the church. Paul is putting him forth as an example to follow. Emulate his self-giving love. Emulate his commitment to the preservation and expansion of the gospel. Negatively, don't be like those who only care about their own interests. Avoid those who care about being at the top, who are overly concerned that all people think highly of them. Makes me think of Diotrephes – who loves to be first. That is not the way of Jesus.

Paul doesn't say that Timothy is valuable because he is a gifted leader, an organized administrator, a dynamic communicator, or because he has a history of success. No, he is valuable because he genuinely cares for the church. Be like Timothy.

II. Be Like Epaphroditus – 25 – Beyond what we learn in this letter, nothing is known about Epaphroditus. The name means honored by Aphrodite. In all likelihood, his parents worshipped the Greek goddess of love and pleasure. Well, God had other plans and saved him out of a pagan family. We talk a lot about the importance of the family, but God's hands are not tied. His work is not limited. He loves to display his sovereign grace by saving people from all sorts of backgrounds. / Notice that Paul describes him in 5 ways:

Epaphroditus is my **brother**. Not by blood, at least our blood. Our true and lasting family ties are blood bought. The blood of Christ is thicker than natural blood. The most common metaphor for the church in the NT is that of family. Over and over again the NT writers refer to us as brothers. The word means from the

² Same construction *ta heatōn*

³ Harmon, 279.

same womb: brothers and sisters, not by natural birth but by new birth. Joseph Hellerman shows there are four themes emerging from the use of family terminology: 1) There is an emotional bond with one another. 2) There is interpersonal harmony and absent of discord among one another. 3) There is sharing of resources within the family. 4) There is undivided commitment to the family.⁴

Epaphroditus is a **fellow worker** – he’s on the same mission with the same message. Worker. He labors for the sake of the church. He is not a consumer, but a contributor. He doesn’t come in 10 minutes late with a mindset of this place exists to serve me. No he shows up early with a mindset to get to work on behalf of others. And this is not just for the dudes. Paul uses similar language over in **4:2-3**. Euodia and Syntyche were fellow laborers with Paul in the gospel. [**Ladies, Titus 2**]

He’s a **fellow soldier** – Not just a worker, but a fellow soldier. Not just work, but war. Soldiers go to war together. The Christian life is war. We have an enemy. Many of them, actually. The world, the flesh, and the devil. Enemies all around, enemies within, and enemies above. We are at war. Starting in Gen 3:15: “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.”

There is war, an antithesis, perpetual, ongoing hostility between the offspring of the woman and the offspring of the serpent, the church and the world, Christ and Satan.

You have enemy. He wants your downfall. He wants you to take your eyes off Christ. He wants the things of this world to make the things of Christ dim. He wants you to stop praying, stop reading the Word, stop being plugged into the local church. He wants you to stop repenting of sin. He wants you to drift. And that’s the way he works, not in drastic ways. In *The Screwtape Letters*, the senior demon tells his nephew demon that “The safest road to Hell is the gradual one – the gentle slope, soft underfoot, without sudden turnings, without milestones, without signposts.”⁵ He is more likely to intervene in your life through smartphone notifications than the occult. / **Eph 6:11-20**

Soldiers must be committed and must be single minded. **2 Tim 2:1-4**. Soldiers don’t get tied up in civilian affairs. They know the ultimate point of life.

Paul calls Epaphroditus their **messenger**. The word is actually apostle, but not big A apostle. Little A apostle just means sent one. For example, in 2 Cor 8:23, Paul mentions the brothers who are messengers (apostles) of the churches.

He is also a **minister**, a servant. Paul paints a priestly hue over the service of Epaphroditus.⁶ This word is *leitourgos*, from which we get liturgy. Priestly work. It meant priestly work in the temple in the OT. It is a worship word. Remember that in the old covenant, worship happened in a specific way in a specific place. John 4:21-24 Jesus told her, "Believe me, woman, an hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem.

You Samaritans worship what you do not know. We worship what we do know, because salvation is from the Jews. But an hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and

⁴ Joseph H. Hellerman, *When the Church was a Family* (Nashville: B&H, 2009), 78-79.

⁵ CSL, 220.

⁶ Harmon, 300.

truth. Yes, the Father wants such people to worship Him. God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth."

In the new covenant, the terms are now used to refer to all of life. And this word previously used for priestly religious service in the temple is now used to refer to the meeting of the needs of other Christians - **2:17, 30 4:18**. 2 Corinthians 9:12: "For the ministry of this service (*leitourgias*) is not only supplying the needs of the saints, but is also overflowing in many acts of thanksgiving to God." Romans 15:27 "Yes, they were pleased, and indeed are indebted to them. For if the Gentiles have shared in their spiritual benefits, then they are obligated to minister (*leitourgēsai*) to Jews in material needs" (15:16).

In the NC, we are all priests. Isaiah prophesied this, that Gentiles would become priests. Isa 61:5-7 "Strangers shall stand and tend your flocks; foreigners shall be your plowmen and vinedressers; but you shall be called the priests of the LORD; they shall speak of you as the ministers of our God; you shall eat the wealth of the nations, and in their glory you shall boast. Instead of your shame there shall be a double portion; instead of dishonor they shall rejoice in their lot; therefore in their land they shall possess a double portion; they shall have everlasting joy."

26-28 Epaphroditus *longs* for the church. Like Paul he cares **1:8, 4:1**. / Then, here we are provided with some balance about death and dying. We saw that Paul views death as gain in 1:21, but death is not glorified. In John 11, Jesus knows he is about to bring Lazarus from the dead, yet he still weeps. Christians grieve, we just grieve differently (1 Thess 4:13-18). We grieve with hope.

29-30 – So. He draws it to a conclusion with two commands: Receive him and honor him. Receive him in the Lord with all joy. In the Lord. How we treat fellow believers is an expression of how we treat the Lord. With all joy – once again – joy. Philippians is about joyful unity in Christ. Receive and honor such men. These men are worthy of emulation, reception, and honor. 1 Thess 5:12-13: "We ask you, brothers, to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work." 1 Tim 5:17-19: "Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching. For the Scripture says, "You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain," and, "The laborer deserves his wages." Do not admit a charge against an elder except on the evidence of two or three witnesses." It is awkward for me to speak like this, but also encouraging because you do such a great job in this area. Keep on.

Honor Christian leaders and workers. When we have guest ministers and missionaries in, honor them well. Ministry is hard. Epaphroditus was sent back home. We don't know why. But he was committed to the gospel. He risked his life. Look to this leader and emulate him. Take risks for the sake of the gospel. Imitate those believers who have persevered through hardship. / Pulling this together, let me close with two take-aways:

1) Be an example. Can you say with Paul "imitate me as I imitate Christ?" If not, why don't you work to that end? Live for the Lord. Be sold out. On fire. Pursue him with all you have. Know him and make him known. Commit to the Lord which means committing to the church. Join (this Saturday)! Repent of sin, pray daily, read the Word, plug into the church.

Titus 2:6-8: "Likewise, urge the younger men to be self-controlled. Show yourself in all respects to be a model of good works, and in your teaching show integrity, dignity, and sound speech that cannot be condemned, so that an opponent may be put to shame, having nothing evil to say about us."

Young people, you can still be an example. Timothy was young. Remember what Paul told him? 1 Tim 4:12: “Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity.” Speech: how you talk. Conduct: how you act. Love: how you give of self. Faith: how you trust the Lord. Purity: how you avoid the world. Rise up, young people.

Big brother or big sister, did you know that you have a lot of influence in your homes? You are a pace setter. Be a godly example for your younger siblings.

Elders, 1 Pet 5:3 commands you to be an example to the flock. Elders are really just those men that we can point new Christians to and say go be like that guy. Go follow Jesus like that guy is following Jesus. Heb 13:7: “Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith.”

2) Follow good examples. You are following examples. Imitation is inevitable. Pick good ones! Sociologists claim that you are the average of your 5 closest friends. Now, I hope you’ll be like Jesus and cultivate relationships with those far from God, but they shouldn’t be your close friends. 1 Cor 15:33: bad company corrupts good character.

Parents, do not underestimate the subtle power of example. Parents, peer pressure is the single most underappreciated reality in the life of your child. Put them around people you want them to be like. Kids, pick your friends wisely. Follow those who are seeking to please God.

Find good examples and do life with them. This is why relational discipleship is so important. D-Groups. / I would also add to read good biographies of saints who have gone before and learn from their example. Let me just recommend four biographers: Sharon James, Elizabeth Elliott (Amy Carmichael or Jim), Iain Murray on anything, Stephen Nichols (5 Min in CH). You’ll be encouraged, instructed, and built up in your faith.

Beloved, be an example and follow good examples. In other words, live for the Lord in the context of a healthy local church surrounded by those living for the Lord. Imitate those who have adopted the mindset of Jesus. Look for the Timothy’s and the Epaphroditus’s. Be a Timothy. Be an Epaphroditus. / Let’s take a moment to reflect on what we have just heard. Pray.