

The Power of Example

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Philippians 2:19-24

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It was the Puritan Thomas Brooks who said, "Example is the most powerful rhetoric." I think the Apostle Paul would've agreed with that. He knew the compelling power of an exemplary life. In fact, I believe that that's probably why in Philippians chapter two, after laying upon the Philippians command after command, precept after precept, now in our passage, he shifts his focus and he presents one of the most powerful patterns of faithfulness in the New Testament. See, Paul knew that his listeners, the Philippians, would need a little bit of encouragement after receiving so many lofty instructions such as, "Let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit. Count others more significant than yourselves. Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. Do all things without grumbling or disputing."

Faced with all of these, Paul knew that the Philippians, and by extension us, would need to see a living, breathing, human example of someone like us, weak like us, but yet who nevertheless lived a life of spiritual excellence. Because let's face it, it's one thing to know that Jesus Christ lived a perfect life, but we're not Him. And we have a sin nature. And faced with all of these commands in the high standard to which we are called, it can be daunting, nay even discouraging to think that we're really meant to live that way. Because when you look in the mirror, probably you're faced with significant weakness in what you see. And the standard that Paul sets forth in Philippians 2 can be hard to bear. So the Apostle Paul, in his wisdom, provides us with a man, human like us, weak like us, yet nevertheless walked in the light of these commands in a way that was both exemplary and real.

So in our passage, in Philippians 2:19-24, we discover in the example of a young man named Timothy, five key ingredients for a victorious Christian life, five essential elements from the life of Timothy that we must embrace so that we too walk in a manner worthy of the gospel. Our five, and they're in your notes already, our five key ingredients are this: a heart for others, devotion to Christ, a record of faithfulness, zeal for the gospel, and a willingness to serve.

Before we explore those five key ingredients, however, let's take a moment to catch back up to where we've been in Philippians. As you recall, Paul is a prisoner under house arrest. He's in Rome. He's riding to the Philippians to update them on his circumstances. He wants to call them to live a unified life, to live worthy of the gospel which they have received. And then, in chapter two, where we find ourselves, he is busy explaining how to live out the Christian life. Verses 1-4, he calls them to live a life of corporate unity as a church, to live marked by selflessness and humility. Verses 5-11, he's going to point to the Lord Jesus Christ as the supreme example of one who perfectly exhibited selflessness and sacrifice throughout His entire life. And then, he builds

upon that example in verses 12-18, and he calls them to live out their faith, to work out their salvation with fear and trembling, which doesn't mean earn your salvation, it means bring your sanctification to its full completion. And then, in verses 16-30, he gets more up close and personal in the lives of a few men who are actually doing this. In verses 16-18, he points to himself as an example of a man who is living according to the dictates and the principles of scripture, who is living victoriously. And then, in verses 19-24, he shifts his focus and he points to a young man named Timothy. And then, in verses 25-30, which we'll explore in another day, he points to a man named Epaphroditus. And the purpose of all of those three lessons, those three men, is to stimulate and spur us on in this worthy walk. Because again, as I said, it can be difficult to see these lofty standards and then see ourselves and find a discrepancy between where we're meant to live and where we may actually be living. So he says, "Let me show you flesh and blood examples of men who are doing it, not to make you feel bad, but rather to encourage you."

So let's dive into today's example. Let's walk in the footsteps of Timothy. Let's enjoy his company in verses 19-24. In verse 19, Paul says, "I hope, in the Lord Jesus, to send Timothy to you soon so that I too may be cheered by news of you." Basically, he's saying, "I want to be there with you. I want to visit you myself. But of course, I'm under house arrest. I don't have the liberty to leave. And I want to send you Timothy because I'm waiting to discover what will the verdict of my trial with the emperor Nero be." He sort of hints at that in verse 23. He says, "I hope to send him just as soon as I see how it will go with me," future tense, because "I'm not sure if I'll be released or if I'll be executed, but my expectation is release. In the meantime however, I want to send Timothy as my representative." And the reason for that is because he wants the Philippians to be encouraged by Timothy's very presence with them as Timothy endeavors to help them walk out the precepts Paul sets forth in this letter, and then Paul wants to be encouraged. He wants to be encouraged by hearing the good report from Timothy that the Philippians have responded to his letter and have begun to walk in obedience, appropriate to his commands.

So Paul says, "Yes, I hope, I hope, and I trust that I will be able to see you, but I'll send Timothy in my stead." Well, that brings us to the young man, Timothy, who we've only seen once in this letter. Chapter one, verse one, Paul says, "Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus." So let me fill in the gaps. Who is this young man that Paul hopes to send to the Philippians? Timothy was a native of either Derby or Lystra, two cities in the region of Galatia. His father was a Greek, his mother was a Jew, which meant he was uniquely qualified to live in both worlds, both cultural contexts, the Greek one and the Jewish one. That made him a valuable ministry ally to Paul.

2 Timothy 1:5 says, "Both his mother and his grandmother were believers." And it's most probable that that's where he first learned the doctrines of salvation, from his faithful mother and grandmother. By the time Paul met him in Acts 16, he was a believer, he was well-spoken of by the church there. And so, Paul says, "I'm going to choose you to be my ministry companion."

From that point on, Timothy traveled with Paul and was Paul's protege. Paul mentored him, he was his discipler. And as you survey Paul's other letters to different churches, Timothy's name comes up many, many times, and you get a flavor of their relationship through his references to Timothy. For example, Paul calls Timothy, "my fellow worker" in Romans 6:21. He calls him, "brother" in 2 Corinthians 1:1. He calls him, "my beloved and faithful child in the Lord," 1 Corinthians 4:17. He calls him, "my true child in the faith," 1 Timothy 1:2. And then, this tender one, "my beloved child," 2 Timothy 1:2. And as we hear these descriptions evidencing the intimate relationship in ministry between Paul and Timothy, and as we look at this description of Timothy's life in our passage today, it will make total sense why Paul would choose this young man to be his ministry companion for years and years and years. And it will make sense why Timothy was such a special young Christian.

So let's explore that together. What made Timothy so special? Why was Timothy the second example that the Apostle Paul would set forth to encourage the Philippian church? Well, it all begins with Timothy's heart for others. Point #1) ***the first key ingredient that we need for a life worthy of the gospel is number one, we need a heart for others.*** Timothy had one. We're meant to imitate that. Let me show you in verse 20. "For I have no one like him who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare." "No one like him," Paul says. "He's unique and distinct among all of the ministry companions I've had and known." And indeed that phrase "like him" is made of one word in the original language, compound word, equal and soul. So it literally could be translated, "He is like-souled." And Paul is basically saying, "Timothy's just like me. There's no one who is as much like me as is the young man, Timothy." Their hearts beat as one. Their minds thought as one. Their affections flowed as one. And surely, it was because of the quantity of time that Timothy spent with such a godly man like Paul, and really the quality of their discipleship.

They were so similar, in fact, that Paul writes to the Corinthians, 1 Corinthians 4:17, "That is why I sent you Timothy, my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, to remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach them everywhere in every church." In other words, "If you want to know how I would be, just look at Timothy. And I'm going to send him as if he were me." And after years of being discipled by Paul, of traveling with Paul, Timothy couldn't help but walk like Paul, talk like Paul, preach like Paul, teach like Paul, pray like Paul, think like Paul. He was a reproduction of Paul, which fits the principle Jesus stated in Luke 6:40, "A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone when he is fully trained will be like his teacher." And Timothy was very much like Paul, his mentor. And specifically, according to verse 20, he was just like Paul in his "deep abiding concern for the spiritual wellbeing of the Philippians." Notice he wasn't just concerned, he was genuinely concerned, which means truly, really, in an authentic manner. It wasn't duty for Timothy. It wasn't obligation for Timothy. It was the overflow of a heart of love for the Philippians.

I want to think about that verb or that phrase, "be concerned" for a moment. So in Greek, that has the idea of something monopolizing your heart's attention, monopolizing your heart's attention. It means to have such a strong feeling for someone or something that you even have a burden for it,

such strong affections and care for it that you actually have a burden for it. Now, that could be a bad thing, of course, especially if that concern is self-focused. Paul uses this exact same word in Philippians 4:6 to say, "Philippians, stop being selfishly anxious and concerned for your own needs. Don't do that." But see, that's not the kind of concern Timothy has. His is the positive kind, the others-centered kind. It was a real concern for their real needs because Timothy knew and loved these people. His relationship with them began at their spiritual birth in Acts 16 when the church was born. And like any good parent, he cherished them from spiritual infancy to adolescence to adulthood. And so, he didn't just care about their spiritual growth, he was deeply concerned, you could even say burdened for their spiritual growth. And in that way, he was just like the Apostle Paul and the Apostle Paul's care for all of the churches.

Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 11:28, "And apart from other things, there was the daily pressure on me of my anxiety," same word, concern, "for all the churches. Who is weak and I am not weak? Who is made to fall and I am not indignant?" And so, you get a sense for the intense concern, spiritually, that Paul had for the churches, and that was mirrored by Timothy.

The question that I would ask you, and the question that I think Paul would want you to ask is, "Is that the kind of concern reflected in your heart for your brothers and sisters in Christ? Are you deeply concerned with the wellbeing of the people in your Bible study group, your growth group, your discipleship group, the very people you may be sitting next to right now, the people you will talk to on the patio after the service? Is your heart impacted by their spiritual condition? Are you praying for their spiritual growth?" Do you call them in the middle of the week and say, "Hey, I just wanted to check in. You mentioned you're going through a tough time at Bible study. How are you doing this week?"

"You mentioned you're struggling with this particular sin. I've been praying about it. I just wanted to call you and see how you're doing. How's the battle going?" In fact, I had a guy in my Tuesday morning group text me this week, says, "Hey, how may I be praying for you?" That's the spirit of the concern that we're meant to imitate in Timothy's life. And you may say, "Well listen, that's a pastor's job, really. I'm a stay-at-home mom. I'm an electrician. I don't have time for that. You get paid for that. You do it."

Well, the apostle Paul would say, "It's actually in every member ministry. Every believer is meant to live this way." And I know that because in 1 Corinthians 12:25, he describes the kind of care that the members of the body are to show to one another. Starting in 1 Corinthians 12:24, "But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, that there may be no division in the body" and catch this, "but that the members may have the same care for one another." And then, he elaborates. "If one member suffers, all suffer together. If one member is honored, all rejoice together." That is in every member ministry that you have been called to and I have been called to, irrespective of age, title, or spiritual maturity. And the wonderful thing is that's what Timothy lived. And Paul highlights this beautiful quality in Timothy. And he, by extension, really by observation, he desires that you and I would walk in

that same level of care for the spiritual wellbeing of your brothers and sisters in Christ. That's the first key ingredient that we must imitate if we are to walk worthy of the gospel.

The *second key ingredient, the second factor we are meant to observe and imitate in Timothy's life, is a devotion to Christ, a devotion to Christ.* Look at verse 21, "For they all seek their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ." Well, in contrast to Timothy, do you know who was not troubled or concerned with the spiritual wellbeing of the Philippian congregation? Sadly, that was the church at Rome. The church at Rome did not seem to care. And it's not to say they were unsaved, because surely there were good Christians there in Rome. But Paul makes it clear that they were self-focused. And it's as if the cancer of selfishness had so spread throughout that congregation, had so metastasized, such that every one of them, as he says, "seek their own interests." And for a man like Paul, who literally laid his life out and down for the gospel, giving even his life for the gospel, to see that in a church would have been immensely disappointing, immensely disappointing.

Let me give you more of a sense for what they were living like. That verb seek, it means "to devote serious effort to realize one's desire or objective, serious effort to reach your desired objective." And it's in the present tense, so what it means is they were constantly, repeatedly, habitually living in such a way that they were striving after what they wanted for their own advantage. And you should read that and be surprised, because this is a church he's talking about. And this is the opposite of how we're meant to live as Christians, right? It's the opposite of 1 Corinthians 10:24, "Let no one seek his own good, but the good of his neighbor." It's the opposite of the way that love operates in 1 Corinthians 13:5, "Love does not insist on its own way." And this was the opposite of the way the Lord Jesus Christ lived, who was the perfect embodiment of Philippians 2:4, which says, "Let each of you look not only to his own interests but also to the interest of others."

Thankfully, that was true of Timothy. It wasn't true of the church at Rome, sadly, but it was true of Timothy. And Paul can point to Timothy as a man worth following, because whereas selfishness had strangled the heart of the church at Rome, Timothy flourished in the freedom of an other-centered attitude. Whereas the rest of the church in Rome was mired in the quicksand of self-interest, no, Timothy walked on the solid ground of commitment to Christ. That's what's implied when it says, "They don't seek those of Christ." Well, Timothy does seek it. And you may ask, "Well, what would the interest of Christ be? What's Paul referring to, 'those of Christ?' What does that mean?" One commentator describes it this way. "One seeks the interest of Jesus Christ when one looks out for the interests of others instead of one's own. One seeks the interest of Jesus Christ when one looks out for the interests of others instead of one's own." In other words, that's just the living, breathing reality of Philippians 2,3, and 4. You seek the interest of Christ by seeking the interests of His own, of His people. And that's what Timothy did. He demonstrated his commitment to the interest of Christ by devoting his life to the people of Christ so that he would bring honor to Christ, which is why Paul could think of Timothy and say, "I'm going to send him at my behest to visit you," because Timothy would happily go, happily make the 1,600-mile round trip journey with no planes or automobiles. He would make that round trip

journey to Philippi so that he could help them walk in unity, so that he could help them count others as more important than themselves, so that he could help them work out their salvation with fear and trembling, so that he could help them shine as lights in the world. And notice, none of that has anything to do with Timothy's own interests. It's purely for the good of those believers. And there is a basic spiritual truth here. You will either live out the reality of Philippians 1:21, "For to me, to live is Christ," or you will live out the reality of Philippians 2:21, "For they all seek their own interests." The question you need to ask yourself is, "Which one am I going to choose?"

It's hard in our culture. We live in the age of self, where you are taught that you sit on the throne, and when your social media account sings your praises with every like, and where every selfie you post is like an incense offering to the God of me. In fact, I had a pretty sad illustration of this the other day. I was at the gym. I see there in the corner there's a young guy, very well-built guy, obviously had invested years of exercise. And so, he's there in the corner by the mirrors. And he's got a tank top on, so you can see his muscles rippling like snakes, and powerfully built young guy. Not so upset with that, right? His chemical enhancements, they look good. But the part that got me, and that really made me shake my head is there in his corner, he set up a tripod, and he had his camera. And he stood back from the camera, and with his physique displayed for all the world to admire, he's posing and he's flexing and he's smiling and he's talking to his camera. And I'm thinking, "What's wrong with this guy? Is he schizophrenic?" No. He's making a video for his Instagram worshipers, because that's the age we live in where it is all about self. And as believers, it's tough because hey, when everybody else is swimming in the sea of self, we feel tempted to dive in and join them, because it looks fun. After all, doesn't God want us to be happy? Why can't I go to church and then pursue my career and my hobbies and my interests? And you've got pretend pastors from pretend pulpits preaching pretend messages like, "You can't love others until you love yourself." And so, we hear that and say, "Well, I better love myself so I can be a good neighbor to you." And then, we get caught up in this nonsense of self. And we dance down the yellow brick road of self, and it's all so merry and happy.

As we go, we ignore the Suffering Savior who's off the path, and His cross is on His bloody back, and He's ascending the hill to Golgotha. And we forget that, "Oh, that's actually the life I've been called to live, a life of sacrifice of self for the good of Jesus Christ." And our culture says, "Don't worry about that." And Jesus says, "Give your life to me. Live your life for me. Live your life for my people's good, for their eternal gain." And that's what we're meant to imitate as we look at the life of Timothy, devoted to the people of God, to the plans of God, and ultimately, to the Son of God. That's the ingredient we're meant to see in his life and then imitate.

A third ingredient for us in this passage, a third ingredient of a life worthy of the gospel, it is a record of faithfulness, a record of faithfulness. I find that in verse 22. Paul writes, "But you know Timothy's proven worth." "In contrast to the self-absorbed church at Rome, you know Timothy. And you know is not head knowledge, that verb speaks of experiential knowledge. You know his proven worth, because well, you've met Timothy and he's been with you before and he

was there at your birth in Acts 16. And about five years later he visited you in Acts 19. And about a year later, he visited you in Acts 20, and maybe other times as well."

So yes, they knew him experientially, and they knew his proven worth. But what does that refer to, that proven worth? Well, in the ancient world, they would use that word in the original language to describe the testing of precious metals and coins. You test them to prove their genuineness and their value. So they would take a coin and they would put it in the fire. The fire would melt away any dross, any impurities. And what would come out would be the pure silver or the pure gold. And it's been validated. Now that thing is worth money because all the impurities are gone. The process has proved it's genuine and authentic.

That's the idea with Timothy here. His character, his faithfulness, had been validated time and time again, tested and approved, you could say, through years of ministry with Paul, through years of relationship with the Philippians. And Paul gives this insight by using the same word, proven worth, in Romans 5:3-4 as to how that happens.

How is this worth, this proven worth, created? Well, Romans 5:3-4, Paul uses the same word and he says, "Knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character." Endurance produces character. You know how ancient blacksmiths used to make swords? Well, they would have their furnace, their forge., They would heat it up to anywhere from 1500 to 1,800 degrees Fahrenheit. Then they would take the metal that they would fashion into the sword, they would thrust it into the forge, and let it heat up. And it would stay there until it began to glow, because when it glowed, that indicated now the metal is pliable. So they'd take the metal out, they would put it on the anvil, they would grip it with their tongs, take their hammer, and begin to beat and pound the metal. And then, he would rotate it and he would keep pounding and shaping the metal. And that process continued heating, hammering, heating, hammering, shaping, until finally that sword began to reflect the desired shape of the blacksmith.

That is the picture of how the young man Timothy developed proven worth, developed a record of faithfulness. His reputation was forged in the fire of affliction. It was hammered out on the anvil of trial and trouble, because don't kid yourself, being a ministry ally of Paul would have invited immense hardship. He was with Paul for years. It began in Acts 16 by leaving everything he knew so that he could follow Paul; left his mother and father, left his occupation, left his home, left all of his friends to follow Paul to where? Well, he didn't really know all the places he would go. And then, Paul had him circumcised so that he be could effective in certain contexts in ministry, immensely painful that process would have been. But he had a lot more hardships to endure, because over the years as he traveled the globe with Paul, as he traversed land and sea, he would have endured persecution and pain, hunger and thirst, heartache and heartbreak, long days, short nights, tired eyes, throbbing feet. Yes, Timothy would have gone through the wringer with Paul. And the amazing thing is, that never caused him to throw in the towel. He endured in ministry. He was faithful in ministry. He stuck it out and he kept obeying, kept serving, kept walking with Paul in his ministry. And thus, his worth was validated over and over and over

again. Timothy was a rare jewel of a man, tested in the fire of affliction, and his worth was proven over and over again. So yes, the Philippian church well knew of his proven worth.

I would wonder, is that your reputation in the church? Are you a man or a woman whose quality, whose spiritual integrity, has been affirmed and confirmed over the years by consistent faithfulness despite opposition, despite hard things, despite setbacks? Do you plod on? Is there steel in your spine, fire in your eyes, that says, "I will keep serving Jesus no matter what because He's worth it"? That was Timothy. That's meant to be you and me.

Well, there's another key ingredient I want us to examine. We've seen Timothy's heart for others, his devotion to Christ, his record of faithfulness. And now, ***number four, we will observe his zeal for the gospel, his zeal for the gospel.*** We're still in verse 22 for this one. "But you know Timothy's proven worth, how as a son with a father, he has served with me in the gospel."

Look at that phrase, "He has served with me in the gospel." That verb, he has served, it doesn't mean he just helped out, he participated in the effort. It means he performed the duties of a slave. This is slave service. One commentator translates it, "He slaved with me," which is to say he lived as a slave in service to Christ for the gospel. And now it makes sense why in chapter one, verse one, Paul would say of himself and Timothy, "Paul and Timothy, bond servants," really slaves, "of Jesus Christ." Because Timothy really was a slave of Jesus.

But I would submit to you, he wasn't simply a slave of Jesus, he was a slave of the gospel. And you might ask, "Why would I say slave of the gospel?" Well, look what it says. "Slaved, served with me in the gospel." That phrase "in the gospel" really communicates grammatically, for the purpose of the gospel. The idea is for the advancement of the gospel. So Timothy was a slave to the gospel because the gospel promotes the glory of Jesus Christ.

And the fact is, you will all be a slave to something. You could be a slave to sin, Romans 6:6, a slave to idols, Galatians 4:8, or a slave to worldly lusts and pleasures, Titus 3:3. That's the way the world lives.

Or you have another option. You can be a slave to the Lord, Romans 12:11, a slave to Christ, Romans 14:18, a slave to the living and true God, 1 Thessalonians 1:9. That's the route Timothy took. And because he was a slave of Jesus, who was the ultimate slave, even in Philippians 2:7, it said, "He took upon himself the form of a bond servant." So Timothy imitated his Lord by being a slave and slaving side by side for the advancement of the gospel. Timothy lived to preach the gospel and promote the gospel. He didn't have another message. He was a man consumed by zeal for the gospel. He wasn't a businessman, wasn't a career man, wasn't a social media man, wasn't a sportsman or a hobbies man. He was a gospel man.

The message Paul is communicating to us is we are meant to be like that. We're meant to be gospel men and gospel women. Don't you want that to be your legacy, is that your children remember you and your grandchildren remember you as the man who was a slave of the gospel, as a woman who is so thoroughly committed to the gospel? Life is way too short to live for hobbies or hunting or golfing or gaming, which aren't inherently wrong, but that's not why you exist. You exist to be a slave to the gospel so you can glorify the God of the gospel.

So let me make you feel uncomfortable for just a moment. When is the last time you had a conversation with an unbeliever about the gospel? And I'm not trying to shame you or guilt you or make you feel bad. But what I am trying to do is show you the standard and the model by which we are to live, a life worthy of the gospel, necessarily implies that we talk about the gospel, that we preach and proclaim the message that God is holy, man is sinful, Christ is Savior, and salvation comes by faith and repentance alone, in Christ alone. There is no other name by which a man may be saved.

If you are here today and you are not a Christian, you have heard of Jesus, and you may be religious, but you are not a Christian and you don't love Him in your heart, then my plea for you is today you must repent. Today you must place your faith in Jesus Christ. You must respond. Let today be the day of your salvation. All that you are living for will turn to dust. Christ is Lord. You must serve the Lord of the gospel.

There's a ***fifth and final key ingredient that you need to know about. This final ingredient for a life worthy of the gospel is a willingness to serve, a willingness to serve.*** And this one is a bit more implicit than explicit in the text. And we can find it in verses 19-23, let me show you. Paul says in verse 19, "I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon so that I too may be cheered by news of you." And in verse 23, he says, "I hope therefore to send him just as soon as I see how it will go with me." And behind his words is the assumption that Timothy will go. He's going to say yes, because he's always eager to serve, always eager to go at my behest anywhere in the world. After all, did Timothy not go to Philippi for Paul, to Thessalonica for Paul, to Berea for Paul, to Athens for Paul, to Ephesus for Paul, to Corinth for Paul? What's one more trip to Philippi for Paul? And so, he is confident that, "Yes, Timothy will go in my stead as my representative because he has always exhibited a willingness to serve." And I wonder, is that the same willingness that abides in your heart, an eager willingness to serve the Lord, an eager willingness to serve the Lord?

Example is the most powerful rhetoric, and how powerful has the example of Timothy been for us? Five key ingredients that show us the worthy walk: a heart for others, a devotion to Christ, a record of faithfulness, a zeal for the gospel, and a willingness to serve. Will you commit with me to imitating that remarkable young man Timothy?

Let's pray. Father, the example of Timothy is profound, inspiring, motivating, compelling, encouraging. And yet, we know that Timothy was so small compared to the perfections of our Lord. May we so love Christ that we would imitate Him and by extension, imitate the young man Timothy, so that we too would walk worthy of the gospel. Amen.