

EXAMPLES TO IMITATE

Philippians 2:19-30

In this passage Paul pointed out that *choice servants* of God provide *examples* for others to *imitate*, *emulate*, and *follow*.

Paul's *incarceration* had made it *impossible* for him to visit the saints at **Philippi**...a fact that he had referred to earlier (**Philippians 2:12**). But his *deep* and *abiding concern* for his friends' *spiritual welfare* prompted him to *send Timothy* to *visit* and to *minister* in his place. Timothy was at the time Paul's *companion* in **Rome** (**Philippians 1:1**) along with Epaphroditus.

This *letter* to the church at **Philippi** would be *delivered* by Epaphroditus and Timothy's *visit* would soon follow.

TIMOTHY...One who genuinely cares (vs. 19-24)

But I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you shortly, so that I also may be encouraged when I learn of your condition. For I have no one else of kindred spirit who will genuinely be concerned for your welfare. For they all seek after their own interests, not those of Christ Jesus. But you know of his proven worth, that he served with me in the furtherance of the gospel like a child serving his father. Therefore I hope to send him immediately, as soon as I see how things go with me; and I trust in the Lord that I myself also will be coming shortly (vs. 19-24)...

The *concern* Paul demonstrated in *sending Timothy* was an *example* for the **Philippians** and *all believers* to *follow*. Not only did Paul give them the *Gospel* and *lead them to Christ*, but he also wanted to be sure they were *growing spiritually*. His *genuine interest* in them continued.

Timothy was Paul's beloved *son in the faith*. Like Paul, Timothy is a *trustworthy example* for other believers to *emulate*.

Timothy was a native of **Lystra** in the province of **Galatia** (part of modern Turkey). His *mother* was **Jewish** and his *father* was a **Greek** and probably a *pagan*. Paul led Timothy to Christ (**I Corinthians 4:17**; **I Timothy 1:2, 18**; **II Timothy 1:2**), probably during his first visit to **Lystra** on his *first missionary journey* (**Acts 14:6-23**). Both his mother, **Eunice**, and his *grandmother*, **Lois**, were *believers* (**II Timothy 1:5**) and had instructed Timothy in the Old Testament (**II Timothy 3:15**). The fact that he *wasn't circumcised as a child* suggests that his father had *educated him* in *Greek culture*, *values*, and *philosophy*. Along with his *spiritual maturity*, his *combined Jewish and Greek heritage* made him *uniquely qualified* to minister the Gospel with Paul to the *Gentile world*. To make Timothy more acceptable to the **Jews**... especially to those in **Galatia** who knew of him...Paul did *circumcise him* (**Acts 16:3**). By the time Paul wrote **Philippians**, Timothy had been his almost *constant companion* for about *ten years*.

With great affection, Paul *spoke of Timothy in many ways*:

- “My true child in the faith” (**I Timothy 1:2**)
- “My beloved son” (**II Timothy 1:2**)
- “My beloved and faithful child in the Lord” (**I Corinthians 4:17**)
- “My fellow worker” (**Romans 16:21**; **I Thessalonians 3:2**; **I Corinthians 16:10**)
- “Our brother” (**II Corinthians 1:1**; **I Thessalonians 3:2**; **Hebrews 12:23**)
- “A fellow bond-servant of Christ Jesus” (**Philippians 1:1**)

Timothy was a *vital part* of Paul's *ministry*:

- *He was with Paul in Corinth* (**Acts 18:5**)

- *He was sent into Macedonia (Acts 19:22)*
- *He accompanied Paul on his return trip to Jerusalem (Acts 20:4)*
- *He was associated with Paul in the writing of Romans (Romans 16:21)...II Corinthians (II Corinthians 1:1)...Philippians (Philippians 1:1)...Colossians (Colossians 1:1)...both Thessalonian epistles (I Thessalonians 1:1; II Thessalonians 1:1)...Philemon (Philemon 1)*
- *He served as Paul's troubleshooter in Corinth (I Corinthians 4:17)...Thessalonica (I Thessalonians 3:2)...Ephesus (I Timothy 1:3-4)...Philippi (Philippians 2:19)*

Timothy was *faithful* and *dependable* in every way and was clearly *qualified* to be an *example* and *model* for the **Philippians** to *emulate*...just as **Paul** was.

Paul often *implored others* to *imitate* or *emulate* him...

“...For in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel. Therefore I exhort you, be imitators of me.”

~I Corinthians 4:15b-16

“Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ.”

~I Corinthians 11:1

“Brethren, join in following my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us.”

~Philippians 3:17

“The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things, and the God of peace will be with you.”

~Philippians 4:9

“You also became imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much tribulation with the joy of the Holy Spirit...”

~I Thessalonians 1:6

“For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example, because we did not act in an undisciplined manner among you...in order to offer ourselves as a model for you, so that you would follow our example.”

~ II Thessalonians 3:7, 9b

I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you shortly, so that I also may be encouraged when I learn of your condition (vs. 19)...

The only *specific reason* **Paul** mentioned for sending **Timothy** was so that he might **be encouraged** when he learned of the **Philippians' condition**. Despite his hope to visit **Philippi** soon, **Paul** expected **Timothy** to have time to *reach them* and then *report back his assessment* of their **condition** before he was *freed from his imprisonment* in **Rome**. His confidence that he would **be encouraged** by that report reveals that *he expected it to be positive*.

Because he wanted the **Philippians** to accept **Timothy without hesitation**, **Paul** gave them a *brief profile* of **Timothy** as a *dedicated servant* of Jesus Christ (vs. 20-24). He highlighted *six personal characteristics* for the **Philippians** to *imitate* and *emulate*:

- **Similar**...*“For I have no one else of kindred spirit”* (vs. 20a)

Kindred spirit...Gk. *isopsuchos*, a *compound adjective* composed of *isos* (*equal*) and *psuche* (*soul*). It literally means *equal-soul* or *one-soul*...referring to *persons who are like-minded*. **Paul** and **Timothy** were *like-minded*.

The goal of *true discipleship* is *reproduction*...when a person is fully discipled, Jesus said, *he will be like his teacher* (**Matthew 10:25**). Over the course of time, **Timothy** came to *think* like **Paul**, *relate to believers and*

unbelievers like Paul, evaluate ideas and situations like Paul, trust in the Lord like Paul, and pray like Paul.

These two men had *similar minds, hearts, and souls... similar passions...similar objectives...similar zeal.*

- **Sympathetic...** “Who will genuinely be concerned for your welfare” (vs. 20b)

Concerned for...Gk. *merimnao*, expresses a *strong feeling for something or someone...often to the point of being burdened*. It described Timothy’s *burden* and *great concern* for the **welfare** of the **Philippian** church.

- **Single-focused...** “For they all seek after their own interests, not those of Christ Jesus” (vs. 21)...

Timothy was *single-focused* in his **concern** for the church ...*in contrast* with the leaders of the church in **Rome**. Paul laments the *self-centered, loveless attitude* of those leaders ...“For they all seek after their own interests, not those of Christ Jesus.”

Yes, the Gospel was *being proclaimed* by a number of men both in **Rome** and in **Philippi**...but it was often *being preached* out of **envy and strife**...and **selfish ambition** rather than from pure motives (**Philippians 1:15, 17**).

Seek after...Gk. *zeteo*, is a *present tense verb*, and means *continually seeks after*. Their *primary interests* were no longer **those of Christ Jesus**...but of **their own**. Similar to the *prosperity gospel preachers* of today.

- **Seasoned...** “But you know of his proven worth” (vs. 22a)

Proven worth...Gk. *dokimen*, means *proof after testing*. When used of a person, it described *proven character* or *tested value...refined*. Timothy *had been tested* and *refined* many times in his service to the Lord...and proved to be *valuable*.

- **Submissive...** “That he served with me in the furtherance of the gospel like a child serving his father” (vs. 22b)

Served...Gk. *douleuo*, used to describe *many types of service*. It’s one of the *most common verbs* used in the New Testament for *service to the Lord*. It best describes a *bond-servant of the Lord*.

In the furtherance of the gospel like a child serving his father...From the time Paul chose Timothy to *serve along side* him, Timothy *surrendered* any *personal plans* he may have had for his life. He began an *adventure* that would bring him *great fruitfulness* and *spiritual satisfaction*, but also *suffering* and *sacrifice*.

- **Sacrificial...** “Therefore, I hope to send him immediately, as soon as I see how things go with me” (vs. 23)

Timothy was a *willing, dependable, and joyful servant* of Paul in their *mutual service* of Jesus Christ. He was *always ready* to **immediately** be sent to *do whatever it was that Paul needed*...and that which would *glorify the Lord*.

And I trust in the Lord that I myself also will be coming shortly (vs. 24)...

Apparently, Paul was waiting for some *decision* in his *legal case*. In view of **verse 24**, Paul was *expecting to be released* from his *imprisonment*.

EPAPHRODITUS...One who sincerely serves (vs. 25-30)

Epaphroditus had been *sent by the church* to take their *monetary gift* to Paul while he was *imprisoned* in **Rome** and to *see how things were going* with him. They sent him with the intention of him *staying* and *assisting* Paul until either he was *released* or *martyred*.

However, Paul *sent him back* when he became **sick to the point of death**. But in doing so Paul wanted to be sure that the believers knew *how highly he thought of Epaphroditus*.

But I thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier, who is also your messenger and minister to my need; because he was longing for you all and was distressed because you had heard that he was sick. For indeed he was sick to the point of death, but God had mercy on him, and not on him only but also on me, so that I would not have sorrow upon sorrow. Therefore I have sent him all the more eagerly so that when you see him again you may rejoice and I may be less concerned about you. Receive him then in the Lord with all joy, and hold men like him in high regard; because he came close to death for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete what was deficient in your service to me (vs. 25-30)...

Not much is known about Epaphroditus. He *wasn't* an *apostle* and *spiritual statesman* like Paul...and as far as we know, he *wasn't even an elder*, like Timothy. There's *no record* of any *substantive work* that he accomplished. *Nothing is known* of his *family*, his *personal background*, his *conversion*, *how long he had been a believer*, or even his *specific function* in the churches at Philippi, Rome, or *anywhere else*. His *name* indicates that he was probably *born* and *educated* in *Greek culture*...just like Timothy.

His level of *sacrificial service* to the Lord is especially *encouraging* for the *average believer* for whom the examples of Paul and Timothy may seem *beyond reach*. He *exemplifies* the spirit of *sacrifice* for the *sake of Christ* that involves *no public acclamation*, *no prominence*, *no official office* or *title*, and *no great talent* or *gift*.

Because the church at Philippi *chose* Epaphroditus to *bring their gift* to Paul and to *minister* to him (Philippians 2:25; 4:18), the Philippians obviously held him in the *highest regard*...and *trusted* him *implicitly*.

After stating his intent to *send Epaphroditus back* to Philippi, Paul first gives *five names* or *titles* that *described* his *relationship* with Epaphroditus...and *names* or *titles* that would also *revealed* his *character* (vs. 25). He then mentions *several reasons* for *sending him back* (vs. 26-30).

But I thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier, who is also your messenger and minister to my need (vs. 25)...

The *first three* pertain to Epaphroditus' *relationship to Paul*. The *last two* pertain to *his relationship to the church at Philippi*.

- **My brother**...the two men had *developed a profound personal affection* for each other. They had *developed* an *abiding friendship* and *camaraderie* as they served the Lord together.
- **My fellow worker**...this is a term uniquely used by Paul to describe an *affectionate partnership...not merely an impersonal, official relationship*. It emphasized their *common spiritual work* together, in addition to their *common spiritual life* they shared.
- **My fellow soldier**...this suggest their *joint struggles* against *common spiritual enemies*. Paul saw him as a *spiritual warrior* in the service of the Lord Jesus. One that would *stand firm* in the midst of *spiritual warfare*.
- **Your messenger**...refers to Epaphroditus as a *special messenger sent by God, through the church* at Philippi, to Paul in Rome...to *meet his needs* while imprisoned.
- **Your minister to my need**...describes the *spirit of service* that Epaphroditus had in *meeting Paul's needs*. It wasn't *work*...it was *ministry*.

Paul's reasons for sending Epaphroditus back:

Because he was longing for you all and was distressed because you had heard that he was sick (vs. 26)...

It wasn't that **Epaphroditus** was *tired of serving Paul*. He wasn't merely *homesick* or *restless* for a *change of work* or *scenery*. Nor was he *afraid* of the *harm* that might befall him if he stayed longer.

He was longing for his fellow believers in Philippi and was **distressed** because they **had heard that he was sick**. He wasn't **distressed** about his *own condition* or *welfare* but solely about the **Philippians**.

Distressed...Gk. *ademoneo*, refers to *deep anguish, anxiety, or emotional turmoil*. This is the *same word* used to describe *Jesus' anguish* as He *prayed* in the **Garden of Gethsemane**. Obviously, **Epaphroditus' distress** wasn't that *extreme*, but it was nevertheless *very real* and *very deep*.

For indeed he was sick to the point of death, but God had mercy on him, and not on him only but also on me, so that I would not have sorrow upon sorrow (vs. 27)...

The **Philippians** had good reason to be worried about **Epaphroditus' health**, because he had been **sick to the point of death**. If God had not **had mercy on him**, he would have *died*.

Sick...Gk. *astheneo*, means *without strength...total drained*.

When God spares a person from *death* it's always a *reflection* of His **mercy**. Here, God not only showed **mercy to Epaphroditus** but to **Paul** also...so that he would not have had **sorrow upon sorrow**.

Despite his *personal loss* that he *experienced* by *sending* him *back*, **Paul** gladly wrote...

Therefore I have sent him all the more eagerly so that when you see him again you may rejoice and I may be less concerned about you (vs. 28)...

Paul knew that *his loss* would be the **Philippians' gain**. But their *joy* in having **Epaphroditus** back in their fellowship *would bring Paul relief*. Such is the *remarkable power* and *reward* of *selfless love*.

Paul selflessly exhorted the **Philippians** to...

Receive him then in the Lord with all joy (vs. 29a)...

Receive...Gk. *prosdechomai*, refers to a *favorable* and *glad acceptance*.

And hold men like him in high regard; because he came close to death for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete what was deficient in your service to me (vs. 29b-30)...

Risking...Gk. *paraboleuomai*, literally means *to throw aside*. It means to *voluntarily expose* one's self to *danger*. With *total disregard* for *his own welfare*, he continually *put his life on the line* for the work of Christ.

LESSONS WE CAN LEARN:

- God brings certain people into our lives that display a deep and abiding faith and a unique example of spiritual maturity that challenges us...a walk that we need to **IMITATE**.
- Just as God used Epaphroditus...a common believer with no official office or title...God desires to **WORK THROUGH US** to serve and minister to others.
- Even when faithfully serving God there will be **DIFFICULTIES** that must be faced. There will be many test and trials...even to the point of death. But even in the midst of those various trials, there is joy.

PHILIPPIANS 2:19-30

19 But I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you shortly, so that I also may be encouraged when I learn of your condition. 20 For I have no one else of kindred spirit who will genuinely be concerned for your welfare. 21 For they all seek after their own interests, not those of Christ Jesus. 22 But you know of his proven worth, that he served with me in the furtherance of the gospel like a child serving his father. 23 Therefore I hope to send him immediately, as soon as I see how things go with me; 24 and I trust in the Lord that I myself also will be coming shortly. 25 But I thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier, who is also your messenger and minister to my need; 26 because he was longing for you all and was distressed because you had heard that he was sick. 27 For indeed he was sick to the point of death, but God had mercy on him, and not on him only but also on me, so that I would not have sorrow upon sorrow. 28 Therefore I have sent him all the more eagerly so that when you see him again you may rejoice and I may be less concerned about you. 29 Receive him then in the Lord with all joy, and hold men like him in high regard; 30 because he came close to death for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete what was deficient in your service to me.