

Two Male Models to Follow

Philippians 2:19-30

Well, next month I will graduate with a Masters Degree in Christian Ministry,
I've been doing this on and off for the last 6 years and I've finally finished.

Now, as a teacher of the Bible, education is a big part of what I do.
So the last subject I completed was on adult education.
And in that unit we were told to be aware people's different learning styles.

Each one of us will process information differently:
Some people like to hear what it is they are being taught,
Some people really benefit if they can see a visual representation
of what's being spoken about.

Others need to be active as they learn
[hands up]

and so the idea is that if a teacher can not only speak
but also illustrate or perhaps arrange an activity
then more of their students will be able process the knowledge.

But even though there are different learning styles,
All of them have one thing in common,
they all are variations on how to teach in a classroom setting.
You might say they are *formal* methods of teaching;
the teaching takes place in a certain location at a certain time,
even though the methods may vary.

But of course, education doesn't have to take place in a classroom.
Life is full of what we might call *informal* opportunities to learn.
Last week I was painting cupboards and I learnt the hard way
what happens when you don't leave the cupboard doors *open* to dry.
The cupboards can end up painted shut! RIP!
That's learning from your mistakes.

How many of you learnt to cook by imitating one of your parents?
That's another type of informal learning:
learning by means of imitation,
learning from watching a role model.

Now, how is it that we learn Christianity? Is it by formal or informal means?
Well, certainly the early Christians had formal moments of training.
They adopted the Jewish practice of delivering and listening to sermons.
We read about the Apostle Paul holding daily discussions in lecture halls.

But it wasn't all lessons and lectures.

The early Christians also knew about the power of *informal* education.
Writing to the Corinthians, Paul says "Imitate me, as I imitate Christ".
Paul knew that if people were going to make great gains in the Christian life
Then it wasn't enough just to speak about it,
you needed to model it so people could learn by example.

Now, I know I can easily switch people off by speaking about education.

For some of you, school was a long time ago,
Maybe school was a struggle, perhaps it brings up bad memories.
Perhaps the idea of standing and teaching others makes you feel nauseous!
But here's a fact, everyone in this room can be influenced by others,
and everyone in this room can set an example for others by the life you lead.
We are all involved in the education of our Christian brothers and sisters,
If not by formal instruction then certainly by informal example.

In our passage today we hear of two men who are models of the Christian life.

On first appearance seems that Paul is simply tying up some loose ends,
—"Timothy will come soon, but Epaphroditus is coming back now"—
But Paul knew that these men offered the Philippians a powerful example.

Last week we saw how our ultimate example is that of Jesus,

"Have the same mindset as Christ Jesus" Paul wrote,
who lowered himself to the point of death on a cross, *for us*.
A sacrificial death to wash away *our sins*
And now Paul paints two brief portraits of a couple of men
who are doing an excellent job of imitating Christ.
In fact, in verse 29 Paul tells the Philippians to honour men like this,
to pay attention to them, to have them teach us by their example.

So what can they teach us?

I think they teach us two things in particular,
two characteristics seen in both of them,
but we'll allow these guys to demonstrate one each.

So first of all Timothy.

Timothy and Paul shared a very close relationship.

Look how Paul describes his younger friend in v22
as a son with his father he has served with me in the work of the gospel.
Not only does this describe the warmth that existed between these two men
But it also hints at the learning-by-example idea that we're exploring today.
Sons were often apprenticed to their Fathers
so they would learn their father's trade as they watched and copied.
As Timothy travelled with Paul he would have learnt about ministry,
not only by hearing Paul preach but by watching Paul in action.

And Timothy soon proved himself to be a worthy apprentice:

We know he did the work of an evangelist,
We know that he was a preacher,
We know that he was entrusted with leadership of the church in Ephesus,
But none of that is what's on display here in Philippians.

Have a listen to what it is that Paul makes mention of:

I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, that I also may be cheered when I receive news about you. ²⁰ I have no one else like him, *who will show genuine concern for your welfare.* ²¹ For everyone looks out for their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ.

Timothy made have been blessed with a lot of skills,
but it's his care and concern for others that's on display in these verses.

Remember two weeks ago when we were thinking about Paul's hardships.

One of them was the unfair things being said by other Christians;
Paul was suffering in prison while others on the outside
were seeking to further their own interests by damaging Paul's reputation.
Paul was feeling that no-one was dependable,
that no-one was on the same page as him,
that no-one was really interested to further the cause of Jesus,
no-one, that is, except for Timothy.

I have no else like him Paul says.

And it was clear that Timothy had a heart for the things of Christ
because Timothy had a heart for Christ's people.

It would have been very easy for Timothy to be distracted with his surroundings.

He'd arrived in Rome, the Empire's capital,
that would have been a big deal for a young man from the provinces.
The job at hand would have been to serve Paul and take care of his needs,
but such is Timothy's level of Christ-like concern for others
that he hasn't stopped thinking about the welfare of a group of Christians
who are in another part of the world.

Which are we more likely to lean towards:

the forgetting of others or the following-up of others?
Just this year I've made the commitment to forget less and to follow-up more.
My own tendency is to just focus on what's in front of me
and so there are some old friendships that have fallen by the wayside,
Christian friends who'd be encouraged by my renewed interest.
When we chat with people at church,
do we listen and forget or do we listen and then follow-up?

Now, we all have limited capacities, and we can't be friends with everyone,

But if our focus is overwhelmingly on a list of personal items to achieve,
on a personal agenda, on a personal timetable,
then maybe Timothy's example contains a lesson for us to consider.

We have some wonderful examples here at Waitara,
 models of people who are really good at this aspect of the Christian life.
 We have great staff here at church—each one of them does a great job—
 including the work of caring for people who might easily be forgotten.
 I notice this particularly with the two staff I share an office with.

Vicki and Emily both have lots on their plate,
 they both have plenty of things that can occupy their immediate attention,
 but like Timothy they both have a genuine concern
 for the welfare of people in the church, for your welfare.
 Vicki is constantly reminding me of important dates in people's lives,
 I've overheard Emily on the phone to former parishioners who now live
 overseas.
 They are great models to me—and great models for all of you—
 of following up and not forgetting.

So this is what we can learn from Timothy.
 What about our other friend in this passage?

Epaphroditus has a less familiar name (I know plenty of Timothys),
 and he's a bit less familiar as a character as well.
 We only hear of him here in Philippians,
 but we can work out that he was a native of Philippi
 who was sent by the church there to look after Paul in prison.
 And if Timothy can teach us about care and concern looks like,
 Then Epaphroditus can teach us about *commitment to the task*.

Have a listen to the way Epaphroditus is described by Paul in verse 25
 But I think it is necessary to send back to you Epaphroditus,
 my brother, co-worker and fellow soldier, who is also your messenger,
 whom you sent to take care of my needs.

What kind of image does Paul intend to create
 when he describes Epaphroditus as a soldier?
 A good soldier is dependable, a good soldier is loyal,
 a good soldier in ancient times was asked to put up with hardship.
 In fact, when Paul describes soldiers else where in the Bible
 these are the characteristics that he mentions!
 He speaks about how we should live to please God
 as soldier lives to please their commanding officer (loyal service)
 he writes about putting up with hardship just like a soldier would.

In ancient times soldiers were in it for the long haul.
 Many of them would have careers spanning well over 20 years,
 and of course, this kind of service would mean putting your life at risk.
 And as we hear more about Epaphroditus,

we hear that just like a soldier he *has* put his life at risk.

It seems that Epaphroditus became ill during his visit to Paul.

Maybe there was an outbreak of some disease in the city after he arrived,
maybe he picked it up as he travelled across the Mediterranean world.

Either way it's safe to assume that Epaphroditus would have been spared this
particular illness had he stayed at home in Philippi.

But he was sent, and so he came and fell ill as a result.

So ill that he would have died had God not spared him Paul tells us.

V 30 he almost died for the work of Christ. He risked his life to make up for the help you
yourselves could not give me.

This is a man who is committed to the task, even if it costs him his life and health.

Remind you of anyone? It's another Christ-like form of service unto others.

My former place of work was at a church in Rozelle in Sydney's inner-west.

Do you remember in 2014, an explosion in a Rozelle convenience store,
where three people living above the store lost their lives?

That weekend there was a public meeting in the Balmain Town Hall,
And I remember very frightened resident, in tears asking about the risk of
being exposed to asbestos after the explosion. She had heard that there were
high levels of asbestos recorded in the air on the morning after the event. The
policeman who was in charge of the community liaison was a gentleman
named Inspector Gary Coffey. I'll never forget his response. He said "As a first
responder, I can guarantee you that I had just as much if not more exposure
to any dangerous substance that may have been flying about."

He was saying "I can't say anything about your exposure, but I can tell you
that I'm in the same boat as you if that's any consolation". And I thought
"What a noble thing to say! And what a noble act of committed leadership, to
be putting your own life at risk for the sake of a community" It's the same
with any member of our emergency services, and if it's true for them then
how much more should it be true for those who claim to follow Christ!

I remember spending some time in China with some medical missionaries

who were working in a terribly polluted coal-mining province.

They told us that we needed to get checked for tuberculosis when we came
home because we could have been exposed by virtue of our visit. I said to one
of them "You can't be serious?" He said "Of course I'm serious. We've done
major damage to our health by moving here. But that's all part of Christian
service. It's just what you do, isn't it?"

Is this the type of Christian service that you would ever contemplate?

To put your safety and health at risk?

There are plenty of examples

from all around the world where people are doing just that.

Are you learning anything from them?

This leads us to the final thing I want to address with you all
and that's to speak a little bit about where we can find some good models.
If we want to learn the Christian life by following some examples,
where are can these examples be found?

We've heard from Timothy and Epaphroditus,
and these guys are just the tip of the iceberg
when it comes to examples from within the pages of the Bible.
Read your Bible and you will see men and women of faith.
Do you remember Abraham from last year's series,
trusting God even when he was totally clueless as to what God's next step
with him would be

Do you read good Christian books?
You can read more than you think,
if you open kindle on your phone instead of facebook.
I've been reading a biography of St Augustine.
An imperfect man who fell in love with God,
who's heart became more desirous of God over time.
What a great example to aspire to.

Can you name someone at church whose Christian walk is an inspiration?
Are you in contact with people enough to see whether they can inspire you?
We need to remember that the education you receive at church
doesn't end when I finish preaching,
it continues on as we observe one another's lives.
And remember, setting an example works in two directions,
Not only should we be on the lookout for people to inspire us
but we've got to be aware that like it or not, people are looking at us!

Does that sound frightening? Well, it's an opportunity,
an opportunity to teach and form your Christian brothers and sisters
as they seek to copy Christ.

Will you allow me to ask for the Holy Spirit's help
as we seek to educate one another as to what it means to be Christian people.