

APRIL 11, 2021 | PASTOR PETER YI

## “Imitate Men Like These” (Philippians 2:19-30)

I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, that I also may be cheered when I receive news about you. <sup>20</sup>I have no one else like him, who will show genuine concern for your welfare. <sup>21</sup>For everyone looks out for their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. <sup>22</sup>But you know that Timothy has proved himself, because as a son with his father he has served with me in the work of the gospel. <sup>23</sup>I hope, therefore, to send him as soon as I see how things go with me. <sup>24</sup>And I am confident in the Lord that I myself will come soon.

<sup>25</sup>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. <sup>26</sup>For he longs for all of you and is distressed because you heard he was ill. <sup>27</sup>Indeed he was ill, and almost died. But God had mercy on him, and not on him only but also on me, to spare me sorrow upon sorrow. <sup>28</sup>Therefore I am all the more eager to send him, so that when you see him again you may be glad and I may have less anxiety. <sup>29</sup>So then, welcome him in the Lord with great joy, and honor people like him, <sup>30</sup>because he almost died for the work of Christ. He risked his life to make up for the help you yourselves could not give me.

As I read to you the following verses, see if you can notice the pattern:

**(1 Corinthians 4:14)** I am writing this not to shame you but to warn you as my dear children. <sup>15</sup> Even if you had ten thousand guardians in Christ, you do not have many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel. <sup>16</sup> Therefore I urge you to imitate me.

**(2 Thessalonians 3:9)** We did this, not because we do not have the right to such help, but in order to offer ourselves as a model for you to imitate.

**(Hebrews 6:12)** We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised.

**(Hebrews 13:7)** Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith.

**(Philippians 3:17)** Join together in following my example, brothers and sisters, and just as you have us as a model, keep your eyes on those who live as we do.

**(1 Thessalonians 1:5-8)** You know how we lived among you for your sake. <sup>6</sup> You became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you welcomed the message in the midst of severe suffering with the joy given by the Holy Spirit. <sup>7</sup> And so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. <sup>8</sup> The Lord's message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia—your faith in God has become known everywhere.

**(1 Corinthians 11:1)** Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.



Speaking of the Israelites during the exodus, Paul writes,

**(1 Corinthians 10:6)** Now these things occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did.

**(Ephesians 5:1)** Follow God's example, therefore, as dearly loved children <sup>2</sup> and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

**(Matthew 10:38)** Whoever does not take up their cross and **follow me** is not worthy of **me**.

**(Matthew 16:24)** Then Jesus said to his disciples, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and **follow me**."

**(John 21:22)** Jesus answered, "If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must **follow me**."

**(1 Timothy 1:16)** But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his immense patience as an example for those who would believe in him and receive eternal life.

**(1 Timothy 4:12)** Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith and in purity.

**(Titus 2:3)** Likewise, teach the older women to be reverent in the way they live, not to be slanderers or addicted to much wine, but to teach what is good. <sup>4</sup> Then they can urge the younger women to love their husbands and children, <sup>5</sup> to be self-controlled and pure, to be busy at home, to be kind, and to be subject to their husbands, so that no one will malign the word of God.

**(Titus 2:6)** Similarly, encourage the young men to be self-controlled. <sup>7</sup> In everything set them an example by doing what is good.

**(1 Peter 2:21)** To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.

**(1 Peter 5:2)** Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, watching over them—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not pursuing dishonest gain, but eager to serve; <sup>3</sup> not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock.

Did you see the pattern? It's pretty obvious, isn't it? The Bible teaches us that a key component we need in order to grow as Christians is that we imitate other, more mature Christians. We grow by the ordinary means of growth. We consume a regular and healthy diet of Scripture, which includes personal Bible reading, listening to sermons with our church community, participating in Bible studies, and so on. We engage in disciplined times of prayer, both in our personal relationship with God and as a congregation. We take the Lord's Supper and receive spiritual nourishment at Christ's table. We exercise our spiritual gifts and serve others. We share the Gospel with our neighbors. We live in simplicity, giving more than we take. We strive by the strength that God provides, to weed out sin and live in obedience to God's commands. We maintain loving and healthy friendships and family relationships. All of these things we do in order to grow. That's what this year's ministry theme has been all about. The CoaH Challenge is about using these ordinary means by which Christians grow. But in addition to that, we grow by observing others, copying others, imitating others.



For example, we learn to pray by listening to how others pray. Isn't that true? Our children learn to pray from listening to how mom and dad prays. I remember when I was a pastoral intern, when I was just getting started in ministry. A great percentage of graduating high school students in the Chicago area ended up going to the University of Illinois, which I suppose would have been like going to the University of Toronto here. When these students arrived on campus almost all of them, if they were Christian, ended up going to this one campus church that specifically ministered to second generation Koreans. Then, like all students, during Christmas break or summer break, they'd return and attend their home-churches. And I couldn't believe my ears. They all prayed the same way. They used the same jargon. They addressed God in the same way. To me, it was all too cookie cutter. I was thinking, I don't think that's the way I taught them to pray. But they're prayers went like this. No matter what it always began with "Father God," which was then repeated at least twenty times in the prayer. "Father God, we just love you, Father God. Father God, we worship you, Father God." And on and on it went. I know that's kind of a silly example, but it proves the point. We learn spirituality, we learn how to be Christians from other Christians who are more mature than we are.

Today's passage gives us actually four examples of the kind of Christian we should follow, in order to grow. Now, at first glance you may think, "Hold on a minute, I only see two examples. Timothy and Epaphroditus." Well, the other two examples are Paul, who is writing the letter, and of course Jesus Christ.

So, let's begin by looking at Timothy. We all know Timothy, because he's mentioned quite often in the New Testament and two letters are personally addressed to him. But let me give you a quick rundown of who Timothy was. Timothy was from the city of Lystra. His mother was a Jew, and his father was a gentile. His mother and his grandmother were converted to Christ and he was converted shortly thereafter, either by his mother or by Paul. This occurred during Paul's first missionary journey, when he evangelized in that city. When Paul returned to Lystra on his second missionary journey, he saw Timothy and was immediately impressed with how much Timothy had matured as a Christian. So much so, that he invited him to join him as his ministry apprentice and companion. He was relatively young when he joined Paul. We can't know exactly how old, but he was most likely in his late teens or early twenties. In (1 Timothy, Paul encourages Timothy saying, "Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young but set an example." That letter was written in the mid-60s. Timothy joined Paul around AD50. So even though 12-15 years had gone by, Paul still considers him relatively young. It was probably at this time when Paul laid hands on him and ordained him into ministry.

Regardless of his age, Timothy was an incredible Christian, enough to be invited to be Paul's ministry companion, and enough that he's highly praised by Paul, and set up as a model and an example to be imitated. What were some of his qualities?

Well, let me list them and then I can share a few thoughts. He was trustworthy, he was one of a kind. Paul says he has no one else like him. He was caring, pastoral, meaning he had the heart of a shepherd. He was deeply concerned for the needs of others. Even though he was so young, along with being trustworthy, he was proven. Paul considered him as a spiritual son, and finally, Paul refers to him as a fellow servant of Christ Jesus.

Timothy was trustworthy and proven. How does that occur? Well, it occurs by being given assignments. Those assignments will be small at first but with every successful completion of those assignments, greater responsibility will be given. That's how it always works. One of the assignments Paul gave him, was pretty hefty. Paul was chased out of Thessalonica on his 2<sup>nd</sup> missionary journey, which is a city he visited shortly after visiting Philippi. He went down to Berea, but his persecutors chased him down to Berea, so he had to flee to Athens and it was from Athens, he sent Timothy on an assignment, to be Paul's representative, so that's what he did. Paul knew that the next best thing to going himself, was to send Timothy. He was Paul's emissary. He was Paul's mouthpiece.



Another quality we see in Timothy was his caring demeanor. Paul writes, “I have no one else like him, who will show genuine concern for your welfare. For everyone looks out for their own interests not those of Jesus Christ.” Now, this is an incredible statement. First, Paul says, Timothy is one of a kind. Can you imagine hearing from Paul those same words? But that’s the kind of Christian Timothy was. There was no one he trusted more, no one who was as faithful as Timothy, and he was so young!! Next, we see that he has genuine concern for how the Philippians are doing. If you remember the Philippian church was experiencing persecution. As well, they were going through some disunity and strife within the congregation. Where would Timothy have learned to care so much for them? It had to have been from Paul. We see throughout Paul’s letter, his heart about to burst because he cares so much for his people. In a different letter, listen to how Paul describes his care, in this case for the Thessalonian believers, after he had to quickly depart from them. He writes,

**(1 Thessalonians. 2:17)** But, brothers and sisters, when we were orphaned by being separated from you for a short time (in person, not in thought), out of our intense longing we made every effort to see you. <sup>18</sup> For we wanted to come to you—certainly I, Paul, did, again and again—but Satan blocked our way. <sup>19</sup> For what is our hope, our joy, or the crown in which we will glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus when he comes? Is it not you? <sup>20</sup> Indeed, you are our glory and joy.

**(1 Thessalonians. 3:1)** So when we could stand it no longer, we thought it best to be left by ourselves in Athens. <sup>2</sup> We sent Timothy,

Can you picture something like this? Paul calls a meeting with his team and says, “Guys, I’m really concerned about the Christians in Thessalonica. I can’t stop praying for them. I know God is protecting them, but we had to leave so suddenly and prematurely. There is so much more I need to teach them. But we all know that I can’t go back. I’m a marked man. Timothy, would you go? They’ll never suspect you. You’re the only one I can trust with this assignment.” And so he went. Timothy must have caught the shepherd’s heart from his mentor Paul. But where did Paul get that pastoral heart? For that matter, where does any Christian, ultimately get that heart? It’s from Christ himself. At the beginning of chapter 2, do you remember what Paul wrote?

**(Philippians 2:3)** Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, <sup>4</sup> not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.

**(Philippians 2:5)** In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:

You see, what Paul is now showing us, through Timothy, is this very thing. This is what it means to live out this Christlike behavior. Thus, to imitate Timothy in these virtues is to imitate Christ. Faithfulness and a genuine care for others is what Timothy possessed.

Let me for just a moment speak to the young people who are listening and by young people, I guess I’m speaking to those in their 20s or younger. It’s been observed that many young people are not responsible, they’re not faithful, they’re not trustworthy, and they’re not concerned about others, they’re not focused on the interests of Christ. Not all, but many. So rather, they can be a bit flakey, it can be hard to get them to commit, they can be overly focused on themselves, again not all, but some, but it doesn’t have to be that way. In fact, it shouldn’t be that way. For all Christians, but especially for young Christians, you must discipline yourselves in the faith. You have to work at it. You need to put in the time and effort. And as a young person, make knowing Christ and serving Christ your ultimate goal. And like Timothy, get into a mentor relationship with an older believer who will come along side of you, speak truth into your life, give you ministry assignments, and help you mature in your faith.



Now, how about if you're an older person. You need to find a Timothy. But before you find a Timothy, you need to be a person who can say like Paul, and with humility, these words, "Follow my example as I follow the example of Christ." I remember hearing a story of a campus Bible study, where a non-Christian was attending, and he had all these questions about Christianity, but eventually he concluded, Christians are the same as Buddhists and Muslims and all religious people. There's no difference. So one Christian challenged him and said, "Come live with me for one month. Watch how I live and see if you can still say that there's no difference." No one is saying, be perfect. We can't. But shouldn't that be the life to which all Christians, young and old, should aspire? All of us need to be able to say, "Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ." Friends, don't go to heaven without bringing another person with you. Don't go to heaven, without leaving behind another disciple of Jesus. That's every Christian's ministry.

Let me share an amazing example of this. One of the first pioneer missionaries to the Native people of North America was an American missionary named David Brainerd who lived in the mid-1700s. When he was in his early 20s, he set out to reach the Native Indians in the Northwest part of America—Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and western New York. Boy, was he an effective evangelist and missionary. He travelled by foot, by horse, and by boat to visit as many villages as he could. And if the Native people would hear him, he would preach, and preach he did, for years, without any fruit, but eventually, God softened their hearts, and hundreds were converted. They came from far away to hear him preach. Now, what's amazing about Brainerd is that he was so young, yet so mature and so effective as a missionary. During his twenties he had tuberculosis. He was regularly spitting up blood, and you could just imagine the lack of health care and medicine, and the difficulties of living in pre-industrialized times. Well, eventually, his sickness got so bad that he had to quit, and he ended up convalescing in the home of pastor theologian Jonathan Edwards. Of course, you all know Edwards. He's the main figure in the Great Awakening. He's often called the greatest mind that's ever come out of North America. He was America's Calvin, and that's no understatement. Edwards saw in young David Brainerd one of the godliest men he had ever met, especially as he observed the manner with which Brainerd approached death. Well, Brainerd eventually died in the home of Edwards, and even though he asked Pastor Edwards to burn all his writings and journals, Edwards ended up reading the journal, and decided this was spiritual gold, and he published it. Brainerd's journal is an incredible look into a young man's exemplary spirituality, a life that had only one goal, which was to please his Saviour. His published journal sparked the missionary movement of the 1800s and has impacted thousands of Christians since. But what's even more remarkable is that Edwards eventually became a missionary to the Native peoples. This undoubtedly was a result of Brainerd's influence. All that to say, just because you are young, that is not an excuse not to be godly. And being young is no reason to think you can't make a difference either. Think of Timothy, think of David Brainerd. By God's grace I hope that'll be true of many of you.

Now, let's look at Epaphroditus. Unfortunately, we don't know much about Epaphroditus, as he's only mentioned here in this letter. We don't know how old he was or anything about his family. Here's what we do know. He was a member of the church in Philippi. Since Paul was the founder of the church, it's likely that he was converted by Paul when he first evangelized in that city. He must have gained some measure of spiritual growth and maturity. Epaphroditus was assigned by the Philippian church to deliver the care package, which included a monetary gift to the Apostle Paul. Paul says that they sent him to take care of his needs (v.25). Also, at the end of the letter, Paul writes,

**(Philippians 4:18)** I have received full payment and have more than enough. I am amply supplied, now that I have received from **Epaphroditus** the gifts you sent. They are a fragrant offering, an acceptable sacrifice, pleasing to God.

That means that he must have been trustworthy and responsible, but more than just delivering a package, he himself was going, so I wonder if the church thought he would be someone who could encourage Paul and be a blessing to him.





He must have been a person like that, but during the time he was away, perhaps on the journey or after he found Paul, he got gravely ill, to the point that he almost died. So, here is Epaphroditus, we don't know if he's a pastor or a layperson, but he was assigned to go to Paul, who's in a Roman prison. 1200km over land and sea, he travelled to get to Paul. Paul was so concerned about Epaphroditus' health, that he said, "God healed him, to spare him sorrow upon sorrow."

In summary, here's what Paul says about Epaphroditus. He's a brother in Christ, a co-worker, a fellow soldier. Just stop there for a moment. That's how soldiers think of their fellow soldiers, isn't it? They're on the same side, fighting the same battle, and equally risking their lives. They're brothers, co-workers, and fellow soldiers. What else? He's also, like Timothy, caring and pastoral. What did Epaphroditus care about? Was he distressed about whether or not he was going to make it? No. He was distressed that the Philippians would be distressed, after hearing about his bout with death. He's the kind of soldier, that though he's wounded, he's caring for others. He's the kind of Christian that hates attention. He's the kind of Christian that doesn't want to cause any grief to his fellow brothers and sisters. He's kinda like Christ.

So, here's what's going on. Paul is now moving the spotlight from Timothy to Epaphroditus. He's showing us another living example of verses 3-5. Let me read those verses one more time:

**(Philippians 2:3)** Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, <sup>4</sup> not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.

**(Philippians 2:5)** In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:

What should we do with people like Epaphroditus? Here's what Paul says. "Welcome him in the Lord with great joy, and honor people like him, because he almost died for the work of Christ. He risked his life." Honor him.

Friends, imitate the Epaphroditus's in our midst. What does it mean to imitate a person like this? It means that we also should become like Epaphroditus. We also should be willing to risk our lives for the Gospel. Look around in our church. There are many godly men and women in our that are worthy of imitation, so imitate them. And regardless of how old you are become a person worthy of imitation. This is how we grow. Then we can finish the task of reaching the nations and growing to become the Christ-like individuals we were all meant to be.

Let's pray.