

**“Tim and Phraff”
(Philippians 2:19-30)
Pastor Peter Yi
November 25th, 2007**

Proposition: We need to model after great Christians

Introduction:

ESV Philippians 2:19-30 ¹⁹I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, so that I too may be cheered by news of you. ²⁰For I have no one like him, who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare. ²¹For they all seek their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. ²²But you know Timothy's proven worth, how as a son with a father he has served with me in the gospel. ²³I hope therefore to send him just as soon as I see how it will go with me, ²⁴and I trust in the Lord that shortly I myself will come also.

²⁵I have thought it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier, and your messenger and minister to my need, ²⁶for he has been longing for you all and has been distressed because you heard that he was ill. ²⁷Indeed he was ill, near to death. But God had mercy on him, and not only on him but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow. ²⁸I am the more eager to send him, therefore, that you may rejoice at seeing him again, and that I may be less anxious. ²⁹So receive him in the Lord with all joy, and honor such men, ³⁰for he nearly died for the work of Christ, risking his life to complete what was lacking in your service to me.

We've already looked at the theme of growing spiritually through imitation while working through the book of Philippians. We saw it earlier in chapter two as Paul encourages us to have the attitude of Christ. We all know that Jesus is our ultimate model and example for everything. He's our ultimate model for the way we relate to God. He's our ultimate model for living a Spirit filled and led life. He's our ultimate model for compassion, for justice, for mercy, for prayer, for evangelism. I mean you name it and Jesus is the ultimate example for us and should always remain that way. It was like this for Paul. He said in 1 Corinthians 11:1 "Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ. So always Christ should serve as our primary model for imitation.

But sometimes Jesus Christ, because he's so perfect, because he's so God that it seems like a long shot, a pipe dream. So we have human examples too. I believe God created us to be perfect. No it won't happen this side of heaven, but he's created us with the longing and desire for perfection. That's why we strive, many times, to do our best, to put in a little more effort. That's why we all have perfectionistic tendencies. But being a perfectionist will only make you neurotic, compulsive and depressive. Why? Because it's an unachievable goal.

So here's the brilliance of Paul's methodology for spiritual growth. He always has as the ultimate goal: Christ. But along the way to Christ, here are some folks that are a little bit ahead of you in the journey that also have Christ as the ultimate goal. And so one way to pursue the ultimate goal is the imitate those who are further along the way on that journey. And I believe that's the purpose of the chunk of scripture we'll be looking at today.

Here's an application point, especially as our church will begin to look further into spirituality and spiritual growth. An important ingredient in spiritual growth is spiritual mentors.

This season for me, winter of 2007, commemorates 20 years of being a Christian. I became a Christian during my freshman year of university. And I began to reminisce about these twenty years that has just flown by and I honestly believe that I would not have grown as I did, if it weren't for a score of spiritual mentors. From day one, there were people taking me under their wing and guiding me in my faith journey. And just as important, I sought them out.

So application number two? If you want to grow as a Christian you have to seek out spiritual mentors and examples.

How do I do that?

Application number three.

In my experience there are three types of spiritual mentors.

1. There's the formal mentoring relationship. Both mentor and student are aware of this relationship and have willingly entered the relationship for that purpose. It can be done newlywed couple to seasoned couple. It's done in a Discipleship small group. I've been on both ends of this relationship. I have sought out on many occasions older, wiser and more seasoned spiritual leaders. And now, as I've been getting older, wiser and more seasoned, people have approached me.
2. Then there's what I call observational mentoring. Spiritual voyeurism. This is when you admire the spiritual qualities of someone from afar, but they have no idea that they're being admired. So you observe the way a person prays and you imitate them. Or you see the manner in which a person serves the church, humbly and without grumbling and you imitate them. Or you witness a person's evangelistic fervor and you adopt that into your life as well. And I have tons of these people and some of them are you. I look at the way you live your lives, the way you parent, the way you love your wives, the way you serve and love the Lord, and I make a mental note and try to integrate that thing into my own life.

A side note to married people. You're being watched. Younger people in our church, in the midst of sharing or chatting with me, have said, "Peter, do you know which couple I admire?.... Peter, do you know which couple I don't?" Folks, the way you live out marriage in the public eye is giving off one of two signals to single people. They'll look at your marriage and say, "When I get married, I want my relationship to look like that." And they're also saying, "When I get married, that is definitely NOT what I want my relationship to look like." Be mindful.

3. Finally, and this is my favorite and I'll call it "Mentored by the Giants". This is where we get mentored by the Spiritual Juggernauts of history. And the only way this type of mentoring happens is through reading. So if you're not a reader, sorry, but you're missing out on one of the greatest ways to grow as a Christian. For me there is nothing that inspires me more than the real life stories of dead Christians. So I love reading the stories of great saints and learn from the way they lived out their lives and try to integrate some of things into my own life. Pastor and author John Piper says something like this. "Dead mentors are in fact the best mentors because they can't disappoint you. They're already dead." My latest dead mentor was through a biography I read this summer on Adoniram Judson, the first missionary ever sent from America. He went to Burma and gave his whole life to pioneering missions in that country where he single handedly made an English-Burmese dictionary and translated all of

the Bible, pre modern day travel, modern day health care, modern day technology, in a politically and culturally volatile place.

Those are the three from my experience. And in my opinion we need all three, but especially #1. Do you know why? Because the first one is perhaps the only one where genuine accountability can really happen.

Application number four, very quickly. You are never too old to be mentored. Never. If you've reached that age or that stage where you think that people should be lining up to seek your graying wisdom and you no longer need the spiritual input from others, then your growth will begin to stagnate.

Today's passage of Scripture is actually a mini biographical sketch of two incredible Christians. Timothy and Epaphroditus. Let's take a look at their lives and see how we might imitate them.

Background:

Paul is in prison in Rome awaiting the results of his trial with the unimprisoned Timothy at his side. But that doesn't keep him ministering to the churches he's planted. So he wants to send Timothy to find out how the Philippians are doing and to tell them that he's doing alright.

Both Timothy and Epaphroditus are Gentiles. Probably converted by Paul.

Timothy (19-24)-he is young. Probably in his twenties, thirties. He accompanied Paul on his 2nd of three missionary journeys. He was left behind in Ephesus to take care of the church there. But several years before that he was ministering with Paul to the people in Philippi. What is Timothy like?

He is one of a kind (20).

"For I have no equal in soul." There is no one that is like minded with me, that shares the concerns that I have. There's nothing like having a right hand man; one that you can depend on, one that's a cut above the rest. Spiritually speaking, I've yet to find anyone like him.

He sincerely cares for others (20).

He cares for the Philippians. Not just a messenger of Paul, but has a genuine interest in the spiritual well being of the people. This care is seen practically. Not just some emotion, or words, but he is going in Paul's place to minister to them. Probably he was next to Paul holding his hands and lifting up prayers on behalf of the Philippians.

He puts others first (21).

There are those who put themselves first. Who care only about their name, and their time and their interests, and their desires and really do not have a genuine concern for others. But not Timothy, he has in mind the interests of Jesus Christ. He is Jesus-like in that he puts others first. Phil 2:5

He is proven in character (22).

There is no one else that he would entrust to such a job that had to be done for the Philippians. No one as reliable. His commitment to Paul and the gospel made him the only candidate for the

job. This is implying that he is one who has been tried in many ways, including persecution and has stood up to the test.

Jonathan Edwards himself was a spiritual giant by any generation's standards. In the 1700's few were equal to him in knowledge, character, or spirituality, but he too, like Paul, was so impressed with a young Native Indian missionary in his twenties who died in his own home that after he died he collected his journals and published them because he couldn't keep the life of such a great man to himself. He had to share this man, David Brainard with the world. So now, it has become one of the most famous journals or biographies of any Christian.

He's a son to Paul. Timothy was a spiritual son to Paul as it was Paul who most likely led him to Christ and it was definitely Paul who mentored and raised him up to be the great leader that he was.

Regarding Timothy, one commenatator sums him up like this.

- In regard to his background, he had a strong religious heritage in his own family, biblical training from his youth, and a strong commendation already as a young man from the church.
- In regard to his service, he was a faithful and consistent coworker to Paul, who regarded timothy as one of his most trustworthy and dedicated associates and to one whom he could assign difficult tasks.
- In regard to his personality and temperament, he was timid and often needed encouragement.

So that's Timothy. A one of a kind, sincere, other centered, tested and mature Christian.

You know, let me just speak to those of you in your twenties. Much of life is still ahead of you. You are still figuring out who you are and who you will be. And you're setting a lot of goals in life: to travel, to be successful, to have fun. But don't ignore setting spiritual goals. Think about what type of Christian you want to be. Many of you have the makings of being a Timothy like leader. Strive to be like him.

And for those of us who are older...I remember as I was hitting my twenties and you watch these super star atheletes or some other performer on TV and it dawned on me that they're my age. And with a mixture of jealousy and pride, I held a contempt for them, secretly wishing it was me on that stage. But as I got older, I began to understand my own identity and calling in life, and then when I saw a young athelete or performer or success story, I didn't envy them, instead I admired. I was amazed, knowing what I know now, that a person so young could be so seasoned, so wise, so experienced, so skilled, so whatever. And I think that's the approach we need to take when we look at the likes of Timothy's. You can look at a 25 year old and say, Wow, I don't know what it is, but she's got it. And imitate them and encourage them.

Let's move on to Epaphroditus. He's no slouch either.

Epaphroditus (25-30)

There is little we know about this man. He is only mentioned here and once more later in the letter. Paul describes him here according to categories he frequently uses. He's a leader in the Philippian church and the church selected him or he volunteered to go and check up on Paul. And Paul speaks highly of him.

A *fellow...* of Paul (general to specific progression)

brother - this is not a synonym for Christian, but a word to describe someone who shares a close personal relationship and has affection for that person. So he is someone that is quite dear and special to Paul.

Worker - those who are co-workers with God, They do the work of the kingdom, the church. I consider many of you my fellow workers as we labor together to build God's church.

Soldier - military term for a person you fight side by side with. Think of all the people you once knew and have now lost contact with, like those people that we knew well in high school. But then think about those people you labored with and toiled with. I think you will never forget them. There were several that I had in college.

How about those war veterans. How they remain true to one another after so many years. Because they sweat and bled and watched their fellow soldiers die, they saved each others lives.

So here it describes one who has suffered for the gospel together with Paul. Maybe ridicule, persecution, trial, and perhaps imprisonment. This is how Paul sees Epaphroditus.

Messenger- one who cares for those in need. Risk taker. Going to Paul may have cost him his freedom and it nearly cost him his life. He became ill and almost lost his life.

One who ministers to the needs of Paul. While he was in prison Epaphroditus was one of the few people who took care of the needs of Paul. Back in the day, prisoners depended highly on friends and family on the outside, for a blanket, food, medical care, for emotional and moral support.

Honorable- worthy of high esteem because of his work in the Lord. He is to be respected, and seen as a spiritual leader. He is a godly model. Honor is earned, not deserved, or demanded. And Epaphroditus has the battle scare to receive the honor that he earned.

Martyr like- He was an Acts 20:24 type of guy.

24But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.

Because of his work for Christ, he nearly lost his life. Just as Christ gave up his life, Epaphroditus was willing to give up his own for the gospel. This is the ultimate test, the ultimate sacrifice. This is a man who has proven himself by putting his own life on the line.

Conclusion:

Friends consider how you're growing or not growing in the Lord. Perhaps the missing ingredient is the presence of a mentor in your life. We do it all the time in other areas. The self help books, the parenting books, the business leadership books are read by tons of people. How about doing one or more of the three different types of mentors. 1. Pursue an active mentoring relationship. 2. Seek out and observe from afar one or two godly men and women. 3. Look to the saints of history.

Why all of this? So that we may become more like the person God wants each of us to be. So that we would become more effective and useful for God's work.

