



# The Imitation Game

## Introduction

Philippians 2:19-30

Paul here presents two models of what it means to be a Christian disciple. First, we have Timothy, and then Epaphroditus.

Timothy is notable for his genuineness. Paul says that he has “no one else like him.” What made Timothy so distinct and so special? He had a “genuine concern for your welfare.” He really cares. He cares for the Philippians. Whereas, sadly, it is true sometimes that even Christians have mixed motives in their service – as Paul puts it bluntly, “For everyone looks out for their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ” – Timothy was different. “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.” Paul is commending the model of Timothy’s genuine concern for the work of the gospel as exemplary to the Philippians. Who do you know like this? Who takes a genuine interest in the progress of the gospel? Model your life on that kind of gospel-centered life.

Whereas Timothy was notable for his genuineness, Epaphroditus was notable for his bold risk taking for the cause of Christ. “He almost died for the work of Christ. He risked his life to make up for the help you yourselves could not give me.” Perhaps you know someone a bit like Epaphroditus, or at least you have read of people who put even their life in danger (if necessary) for the cause of Christ. Well, here is another model for us to emulate. Not just genuineness – which on its own can seem a little weak – but also bold risk taking for the cause of Christ.

Each of us have our own God-given characteristics and personality. But in Epaphroditus and Timothy we see elements of what it means to be a follower of Jesus today. Genuine concern. And risk taking for the cause of Christ. Be like these men, Paul is saying, by describing their strengths to the Philippian church. These are the kind of people that you are to be like. Not selfish, but concerned for others. Not cowardly, but brave to take care of those in prison for preaching Christ like Epaphroditus took care of Paul.

Which part of these characteristics convict you? Are you needing to ask God to give you a more wholehearted and unpretentious commitment to the gospel? It’s easy to merely know the right language and say the right things, without really meaning them. Be more like Timothy. Or perhaps you are not as willing as you might be to risk your resources, even your life, for the cause of Christ. Look at Epaphroditus. Be more like him, says Paul.

It’s important to hold up for emulation models of exemplary Christian service, especially when all around us other models for copying are being held up by the media. Instead of copying a movie star, or a celebrity, or a YouTube sensation, copy Timothy. Copy Epaphroditus. Be genuine. Even take risks. All for the sake of the progress of the gospel.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Devotional by Josh Moody found @ <https://godcenteredlife.org/devotional/philippians-219-30-two-models-of-exemplary-christian-living/> © 2014–2018 God Centered Life. All Rights Reserved.

## Open it

1. Who are some of the people you work closest to on a daily basis? What position or function do they perform? What qualities do they exhibit that make them effective coworkers?

## Read it

Philippians 2:19-30

## Explore it

2. Why does Paul think Timothy might be a good thing for the Philippians?
3. How did Paul describe his relationship with Timothy?
4. Why did Paul think Epaphroditus should head home instead of staying with him?
5. How was the church to receive these two men when they arrived in Philippi?

# Apply it

## “Show You the Way to Go”

In this paragraph, Paul was still discussing the submissive mind. He has given us a description of the submissive mind in the example of Jesus Christ (Phil. 2:1–11). He has explained the dynamics of the submissive mind in his own experience (Phil. 2:12–18). Next, he introduced us to two of his helpers in the ministry, Timothy and Epaphroditus, and he did this for a reason. He knew that his readers would be prone to say, “It is impossible for us to follow such examples as Christ and Paul! After all, Jesus is the very Son of God, and Paul is a chosen apostle who has had great spiritual experiences!” For this reason, Paul introduced us to two ordinary saints, men who were not apostles or spectacular miracle workers. He wanted us to know that the submissive mind is not a luxury enjoyed by a chosen few; it is a necessity for Christian joy, and an opportunity for all believers.<sup>2</sup>

**6. Who are those around you that serve as an example of godly living and service? In what ways do they exemplify a heart of humility and service?**

**7. In the previous passage (vs. 12-18) Paul spoke about serving and living a life without grumbling and questioning. What characteristics did Epaphroditus and Timothy exhibit that made them a great example of what Paul was commanding the Philippians to do?**

*Howard Hendricks says that a Christian man needs three men in his life—a Paul, a Barnabas, and a Timothy. Paul represents your spiritual mentor, Barnabas a close personal friend, and Timothy a disciple who looks to you for leadership. We need mentors, friends, and disciples to be well-rounded Christians.<sup>3</sup>*

**8. Who is your spiritual mentor and who looks to you for spiritual help? What keeps people from investing in these ways? How can these relationships create well-rounded Christianity?**

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<sup>2</sup> Wiersbe, Warren W.. Be Joyful (Philippians): Even When Things Go Wrong, You Can Have Joy (The BE Series Commentary) (p. 86). David C Cook. Kindle Edition.

<sup>3</sup> Sermon excerpt entitled “Making God’s “A” Team” by Ray Prtichard found @ <https://www.keepbelieving.com/sermon/making-gods-a-team/>

## I'll Be There

Here's what we know about Timothy. Timothy helped found the church at Philippi. The Philippians would have remembered Timothy, because he played a very important role in their spiritual lives. He was someone who had sacrificed to influence them. Timothy had also served with Paul for ten years. Ten years – that's amazing. If you've ever worked side-by-side with someone through highs and lows, walked through difficulty after difficulty, then you know that's impressive. Timothy had proved himself, as Paul says. He had a good track record over an extended period of time.

It seems as if the Philippians had expected Timothy to come sooner. In this passage, Paul explains to the Philippians that Timothy will come soon, but just not yet. It looks like the Philippians would have been disappointed that he wasn't able to come sooner. We also know something about Timothy's character from other parts of the Bible. Timothy was known for a lot of things, but one of them wasn't his courage. Timothy was timid. He went through a lot, and served well, but for him, the criticism that came was probably tougher than even prison. He wasn't known for being the most courageous person.<sup>4</sup>

9. Paul made sure to affirm and recognize his disciple. Why is it important for us to speak words of affirmation to those who are following us?

Over time Paul came to trust Timothy so completely that he became a kind of stand-in for the apostle, his right-hand man who represented Paul when he himself couldn't go to a certain city or church. One writer says that Timothy was FAT—Faithful, Available, and Teachable! Paul seems to imply something like that in verse 20 when he says that he has no one “like him.” The Greek word literally means “same-souled.”<sup>5</sup>

10. Timothy was a “FAT” Christian (see above). Which one of these areas is your strongest and which is your weakest? How can you grow in this particular area?

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<sup>4</sup> Sermon excerpt entitled “A Life In Service” by Daryl Dash found @ <https://dashhouse.com/20021020a-life-of-service-philippians-219-30-html/>

<sup>5</sup> Sermon excerpt entitled “Making God's “A” Team” by Ray Pritchard found @ <https://www.keepbelieving.com/sermon/making-gods-a-team/>

11. Being a FAT Christian demands that we live out these three characteristics. Spend some time discussing the outcomes of the following scenarios.

- Faithful & available but unteachable = \_\_\_\_\_
- Available & teachable but unfaithful = \_\_\_\_\_
- Teachable & faithful but unavailable = \_\_\_\_\_

12. How can doing ministry together make you closer friends to those you serve alongside? When have you grown a deep relationship with some because you served with them?

#### “All I Do Is Think of You”

*“Concerned” carries a specific meaning, because it indicates having strong feelings for something or someone. It conveys deep emotions, and it can be used either negatively or positively. It is used in the negative sense later in this letter when Paul writes, “Be anxious for nothing” (4:6). “Anxious” is the very same word that is translated in 2:20 as “concerned.” When someone is anxious, they are emotionally weighed down. In such a state, they are burdened and fretting. But here in 2:20, the word is used in a positive way. Timothy feels deeply for the welfare of the Philippians, even burdened for them, and so he will serve them. Not everyone, even in the church and even in leadership within the church, is like this. There are others Paul knows of who, “all seek after their own interests, not those of Christ” (v 21). Timothy is genuinely concerned for the welfare of the believers in Philippi, while these others are obsessed only with themselves.<sup>6</sup>*

13. What does it mean for us to be genuinely concerned for others today? When can this be a problem and how do we find a proper balance?

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<sup>6</sup> Lawson, Steven. *Philippians For You: Shine with joy as you live by faith* (God's Word For You Book 18) (p. 121). The Good Book Company. Kindle Edition.

Paul said that after many months (and perhaps years) of apprenticeship, Timothy had “proved himself.” The word means to be approved by passing a test. It has the idea of demonstrating under pressure that you have the “right stuff.” How did Timothy prove himself? By sticking with Paul through thick and thin. By volunteering to tackle the hard jobs. By refusing to cut and run under fire. By doing the menial tasks, the “dirty work” so that Paul was freed up to do what he did best.<sup>7</sup>

**14. As a result of years of partnership Paul said Timothy was proven worthy when it came to ministry. How is a person's character proven worthy? Looking back at your own ministry where might others say you have been proven worthy?**

### **“Strength Of One Man”**

Epaphroditus was a leader in the church at Philippi who was sent by the church with a gift for Paul. His name is not mentioned elsewhere in the New Testament. He doesn't seem to have been a preacher in the usual sense of the word. He fits more into the mold of a deacon—a godly layman willing to serve, willing to go, and willing to risk everything for the cause of Christ. Paul uses three terms to describe Epaphroditus:

- *BROTHER*—Members of the same family (We are one)
- *FELLOW WORKER*—Members of the same team (He is my equal)
- *FELLOW SOLDIER*—Warriors for the same cause (He is sold out to Christ)

Verse 25 contains one more term that you might miss if you read the text only in English. When Paul calls him “your messenger,” he uses the Greek word for “apostle”—which literally means “one who is sent officially representing someone else.” Usually the term means an apostle designated by Jesus Christ—as in the “12 apostles” or the “Apostle Paul.” Here Paul uses the same term in a more general sense—that Epaphroditus is an “apostle” sent by the Philippians to aid another apostle in Rome. High praise indeed!<sup>8</sup>

**15. Paul speaks of Epaphroditus with similar terms and equal footing. Why is this so important within church ministry? What happens when we fail to follow this example?**

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<sup>7</sup> Sermon excerpt entitled Making God's “A” Team by Ray Pritchard found @ <https://www.keepbelieving.com/sermon/making-gods-a-team/>

<sup>8</sup> IBID

16. Epaphroditus was willing to serve God and his fellow believers no matter what it meant for him. What does this type of devotion to the mission of Christ say to the church as well as the world?

### **“We Can Change the World”**

*Did you notice how these seemingly mundane words about the travel schedules of these men illustrate what Paul has been saying throughout chapter 2? He has told us that we should do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind to regard others more highly than we do ourselves; not looking out for our own interests, but for the interests of others (2:3-4). Then he gave us the great example of our Lord, who laid aside His rights, took on the form of a servant, and became obedient to death on the cross. Therefore, God highly exalted Him (2:5-11). Jesus had a servant’s heart; He endured a servant’s hardships; He received a servant’s honor. That’s the pattern for all who serve Him.*

***Let’s all strive to become imitators of Timothy and Epaphroditus; but not only of them, but of the Apostle Paul; and, beyond him, of our Lord Jesus Himself. There should be only one entrance to the church: the servant’s entrance!<sup>9</sup>***

17. Our text focused on two men who brought joy to others in the present and left a faithful legacy to those in the future. How can you go about doing the same in the days to come? What might need to change for this to be a reality?

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<sup>9</sup> Sermon excerpt entitled Making God’s “A” Team by Ray Pritchard found @ <https://www.keepbelieving.com/sermon/making-gods-a-team/>  
Note: This study was compiled and questions were written by Pastor Tim Badal, Village Bible Church. [www.villagebible.church/smallgroups](http://www.villagebible.church/smallgroups)