

Philippians 2:19–24 (NKJV)

19 But I trust in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you shortly, that I also may be encouraged when I know your state. 20 For I have no one like-minded, who will sincerely care for your state. 21 For all seek their own, not the things which are of Christ Jesus. 22 But you know his proven character, that as a son with his father he served with me in the gospel. 23 Therefore I hope to send him at once, as soon as I see how it goes with me. 24 But I trust in the Lord that I myself shall also come shortly.

If there is a title to this sermon, it would be-

When unremarkable people become remarkably useful.

What do you think it takes to become a **useful person** for the Kingdom of God?

What do you think it takes to become **more useful** than you have ever been in the Kingdom of God?

You know what the biggest surprise is in the process?

It is not by remarkable **accomplishments**. It is not based on your **skill level**. It isn't even about **being exceptionally gifted**. It does not require extreme relational charisma. One need not be an exceptional teacher or preacher.

How do we know all this?

Because our sermon this morning is about Timothy.

Timothy is a person who the Bible tells us a story about. It gives us clues to how he **matured**. We see bits and pieces, clues, from the time he came to Christ to the time he became Paul's right hand man. The bible gives us clues about what kind of person he was. It tells us about his weaknesses. We can tell by what Paul tells the churches where **Timothy is headed** what **shortcomings** Timothy had.

We are not told about him doing any miracles. We don't have any of the sermons he preached. We see no evidence of special skills. He did have spiritual gifts. But not much is made of them.

So how did this unremarkable person reach the state where he became the person of choice to represent Paul, one of the greatest evangelist that ever lived. How did he get **there** from **here**? Because if **Timothy** can get there, there is great evidence that **we** can get there too.

Today we are going to look at the traits of Timothy that Paul refers to. Hopefully it will inspire us to take it up a notch, to applying ourselves to even **greater usefulness** in the kingdom.

But before we go to our text, let's look at some of Timothy's history.

Timothy was from the land of modern day Turkey. He was from Lystra in the province of Galatia. His mother, Eunice was Jewish and his father was a Greek.

Scripture says “but his father was a Greek”, in contrast to his mother who was a believer, so his father probably was not a believer. The fact that Timothy was not circumcised tells us that his father had little concern over Jewish traditions.

Eunice and her mother, at some point, came to Christ. Paul led Timothy to Christ based on 1 Cor 4:7, 1 Tim 1:2 and 2 Tim 1:2. This probably happened on Paul’s first missionary journey.

Timothy was trained by his mother and grandmother about the Old Testament. He also was probably well educated with a Greek education by his father. So he was well suited to be involved in the ministries Paul had in mind, since it was to both Jews and gentiles.

After Timothy was saved, he remained in the church fellowship at Lystra. That is where he began to grow. Remember how Jesus said that those faithful in **little things** will be given **more**. That is what Timothy did. He grew where he was planted. He must have taken whatever opportunities he had to be growing and useful in the church. Because when Paul made it back to that general area later Scripture says this:

Acts 16:2–3 (NKJV)

2 He was well spoken of by the brethren who were at Lystra and Iconium.

We learn something about Timothy here. He was growing in obscurity. When very **few people** were looking on, he was doing the **right things for the right reasons**. He was making himself useful to people because He loved the Lord. He probably had no ambitions of being a co-minister of Paul’s. I doubt he ever imagined what God had in store for him.

But vs 3 in Acts 16 says this:

3 Paul wanted to have him go on with him. And he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in that region, for they all knew that his father was Greek.

The circumcision was an interesting issue. Paul had Timothy circumcised, but not Titus. And I think it was due to different circumstances. But think about that. At Timothy’s age, many think he may have been a teenager, this would not have been a **small** consideration. But we see no resistance on Timothy’s part. If we think about that a little, we already see what made Timothy **so useful** to Paul. Timothy started by being willing to pay whatever price he needed to pay to be useful to the gospel of Christ.

What price are we willing to pay? What inconveniences are we willing to accept? What hardships are we willing to face? Timothy showed right from the start that he was not going to declare his rights. He would do what is needed.

By the time Paul wrote the book of Philippians, Timothy was probably with Paul for 10 years. By that time Paul referred to him as **“my true child in the faith, my beloved son, my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, my fellow worker, our brother, and fellow bond servant of Jesus Christ.”**

Timothy was with Paul in Corinth, was sent to Macedonia, and accompanied Paul to Jerusalem. He was sent to work out problems in Corinth, Thessalonica, Ephesus, and Philippi.

He was with Paul during the writing of Romans, 2 Cor, Phil, Col, 1 and 2 Thes and Philemon.

Just to give us the flavor of Paul’s relationship with Timothy I would like to read this advice Paul gave to Timothy.

2 Timothy 3:10–15 (NKJV)

10 But you have carefully followed my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, love, perseverance, 11 persecutions, afflictions,

Then jumping to 14

14 But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, 15 and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.

What is it that made Timothy so useful?

Every day he showed up for class. That is the best way I know how to say it.

He continued. He kept waking up and doing the same thing.

And what was the thing? **He followed.**

And what did he follow?

Doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, love, perseverance, persecutions, afflictions.

And what would that have required to do all that?

Intense intentional effort every day.

Timothy had to show up for class and say “yes sir” to Paul and to the Holy Spirit.

This stuff did not just **happen** to him. We know that because Paul tells him to

Continue in the things. Keep **doing them** like you **have been** doing them.

So do we want to be more useful in the kingdom tomorrow?

If we do, use your hours **today** for that purpose. Use your **mind** for that purpose.

Copy the lives of Paul and Peter and Jesus from scripture. Align yourself with someone who can help you grow, someone who you trust their walk is worthy of following.

Meeting Paul is not what **made** Timothy useful. Meeting Paul is what **escalated** Timothy's usefulness. Timothy was involved in the process of following Christ, step by step, **before** he met Paul. It was not an event that made Timothy useful. It was the process of following.

We need not think that if I could just meet **someone like Paul**, then I would become **useful**. That is not how it works. We need to be useful where we are. And it is interesting. Timothy never made any attempt to break out on his own. He never allowed his pride to drive a wedge between him and Paul. And I really don't think Paul would have been easy to work with. He would have been a very demanding person. Timothy never lost sight of servanthood.

So do we want to be more useful? Look at **what your life is full of**, and make small changes every day to make it more full of Jesus. Don't know where to start? Just write down one biblical command you wrestle with and start there.

What made Timothy exceptional was not anything of himself. What made Him exceptional was his moment by moment commitment to Christ and his gospel. OK, let's look at the text.

19 But I trust in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you shortly, that I also may be encouraged when I know your state.

I trust in the Lord Jesus

Paul does not say "I promise I will send Timothy to you because that is what I have decided."

Paul does not say "God told me to send Timothy so I am sending Timothy and he will surely make it there safely."

No he says, "I trust in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy."

From all I can tell this is very similar to what James tells us. When we are making plans we should say, "**if the Lord wills.**" I think Paul is saying that I **live** in the trust in the Lord. I make **all my decisions** trusting Him. I think that what I am deciding now **IS** his will. So I send him with that trust. Now I am wrong sometimes. I am not always sure what His will is. I could be wrong. But I don't think so.

Some would tell us that this is not the spiritual way to do things. They might say you need to make up your mind, tell God what you want, and then keep believing He will do what you ask and He is bound to do so.

But Paul does not exhibit that attitude when he makes plans. He makes his plans, plans he thinks through and decides on using his reason, trusting in the Lord.

to send Timothy to you shortly

Paul is going to send his right hand person. Remember that there was no way to communicate with people far away unless you sent a person with a letter or you went yourself. From Rome to Philippi was a boat ride across the sea and then a 360 mile hike. A fit person can walk 30 miles per day. So this would be a 12 day walk. Sending Timothy would be no small gift. I think we lose sight of what a big deal travel was back then. This trip would be like walking to Ocean City MD. Now Paul says shortly but we can learn in this context that **shortly** was a very relative term. Later Paul says he hopes to come **shortly**. But it appears to be after Timothy returns from this trip. So it would **at least** be a couple of months. I doubt that the Philippians were holding their breath. They would have known what Paul meant.

Now Paul begins to talk about the qualifications of the person he is sending.

20 For I have no one like-minded, who will sincerely care for your state.

The word for like-minded is not used very often so it is difficult to know exactly what Paul means. But it seems to be something like **kindred spirits**. I can't think of that phrase without thinking of **Anne of Green Gables**. A kindred spirit sees the world with the same kind of view that you have. They want the same thing. They react the same way. They will pay the same cost for that which matters. It is that sort of thing.

So when Paul sees a need at a church that needs ministered to, Timothy is right there with Paul, willing to do whatever is needed to meet the need.

21 For all seek their own, not the things which are of Christ Jesus

Now when I have read this up until now I thought this was **very sad**. I thought Paul was casting a bad light on **all** of his fellow workers who he spoke of so well in the past. People like Luke and Titus. But odds are what Paul is saying is limited to **his local context**. The leadership of the Roman church are not at all kindred spirits with Paul. They are envious and full of self. So Paul is not going to send them. Even though it may have been much more convenient for Paul to do so, he probably found Timothy's fellowship and service very valuable to Paul personally, but these other men were not **willing** to serve. And even if Paul sent them, he could not have any **confidence** they would serve Paul's purposes.

Now there is something interesting here that I did not know. The word for care is the same Greek word used for worry. So the translators translate the word differently depending upon the context it is in. If it is a bad context, a forbidden context, it is called **worry**. If it is a good context, it is called **concern**.

In this instance it is a **mental focus** on an **unfortunate** or **unfavorable** thing that requires our attention and action in hopes of a favorable outcome. This concern is not only cognitive. This focus also affects our feelings.

The Greek people reading this probably would think **our way** of saying it is **too mild**. They understood that their condition of concern was of deep and moving concern to Timothy. He is going to be like a parent when their child is very sick. This is stronger than just giving health care for the child. It is to be emotionally involved with the outcome.

I suspect that the difference between the **good** use of concern and the **bad** use of worry is that the **good use** is what happens when you truly love someone like you love yourself. The good use drives you to constructive action while maintaining a full trust in God. The good **concern** causes a **brother's hurt** to become **your** hurt. But it is enveloped in a confidence that God is still in charge and still working. The bad use is when you are worked up in this state due to a **mistrust** of God. It is where you take your eyes off of God and focus only on the circumstance.

Where Paul says, "**Your State**", he is probably talking about the concerns he has already mentioned and will mention later in the letter. He is concerned about their **handling persecution** and about **keeping unity** in the gospel.

So Paul is saying I do not have anyone in Rome with me right now that will take your situation fully to heart. They will not care about it like Timothy will.

What is the difference?

21 For all seek their own, not the things which are of Christ Jesus.

Again, this is not every fellow minister. He is most likely talking about the Roman church leadership. And these leaders clearly are not fit to be leaders. They are exploiting the sheep, not shepherding them.

Now notice that this is a difference between those **who are qualified** to be sent to Philippi and **those that are not**. And Timothy was clearly someone who was qualified.

Timothy was seeking the things which are of Christ. Timothy's motivation is to please Christ and to meet the needs of these believers, even if it is expensive to him personally. And I would call a 24 day hike pretty expensive. Who would **you** take a 24 day hike for?

And once he got to Philippi he would get down to business. He would dig into the source of the problems and address them. Then he would report back to Paul exactly what he found and what happened.

Now I am sure that Timothy's 10 years of experience are going to come into play. He has learned to handle these situations over time. But again, how did he

become so useful? Well Paul says **stay in Ephesus** and Timothy does. Paul says **go to Thessalonica** and he does. Paul says **deal with this situation** that is way over your head, and this is how to do it, and Paul does. We never see him push back. He just faithfully does the next thing. **That is the path to usefulness.** He cared more about pleasing His savior than his own preferences. He cared more about the people he was ministering to than his own stuff. He cared more about doing what Paul told him to do than **finding reasons why he could not do** that thing.

And he did that day after day after day after day.

22 But you know his proven character,

Proven character. How does that happen? The word really means proof after testing.

It is something that has been thoroughly examined and it has proven to be what it is supposed to be.

It seems to me that the people who are usually the most qualified to examine us are those believers who know us the best. In this case Timothy had fleshed out his commitment to Christ and to ministry in front of these people. They would have seen him in real life.

They were qualified to have an evaluation of Timothy. For us it could be the people most qualified to evaluate us are those in our families. Now sometimes they use the wrong evaluations. But **they see the real us.** How do we respond to life? Do we run to Christ in adversity, or do we do something different? Are we focused more on **our own needs** and desires or preferences? Or do we focus on **those around us?** Do we focus on our desires for others to serve us? Or do we go out of our way to **serve them?** Do we want to become more useful for the Kingdom? Practice at home better. See your spouse or children or extended family as ministry practice. Prove the character. Use the people at our church as ministry practice. Ask how can I love and serve them better? As you do that you are **proving a character** that will stand up to any accurate evaluation. People will know your proven character. Maybe they already do. But there is no one who does not have room to get better at it.

that as a son with his father he served with me in the gospel.

So anyone looking on would have seen that Timothy was submitting to Paul's guidance. Timothy was not jockeying for the top spot. He wasn't threatening to take his ball and go home. He was not making plans to begin the Timothy ministry association.

No Timothy was content for Paul to be the boss. He treated him with respect. He submitted to Paul's authority. And he did it, not for himself, not for Paul, but ultimately it was a **thing of Christ** he was doing it for. He did it for the gospel. He set the standard for how ministers should behave in ministries. He showed how to **maximize usefulness**. He did not sit around giving Paul advice and think that pointing out what **Paul** ought to be doing is some kind of **significant help**. He didn't balk every time Paul gave him something to do because what Timothy was **already doing** was more important than what **Paul was asking**. No, he set himself to do that which Paul saw needing done. He showed ministers what submission looks like.

23 Therefore I hope to send him at once, as soon as I see how it goes with me.

Again we see why Paul is sending Timothy. That is the basis of the therefore.

Timothy is an excellent tested minister. Therefore I am confidently sending him. Can people do that of us?

Can they say confidently if they send us to minister we will deliver the goods. If something needs proclaimed, we will proclaim it. If something needs rebuked we will rebuke it. If someone needs compassion, we will deliver it. If someone needs something that is very costly to us, we will gladly pay it.

Isn't Timothy a wonderful example of what all of us can become over time?

Paul says **I hope**. The word might be a notch short of absolute certainty in this context, but it expresses Paul's full intention. If nothing crazy happens, Timothy will be on his way.

When? **At once**. But the "at once" is qualified by "as soon as I see how it goes with me." Some say that Paul wants to see the outcome of the court case.

Others read from what Paul has already said that he fully expects to be set free, so it is probably some other detail that needs handled before Paul is ready to send Timothy.

We cannot know for sure.

I am comforted by all this that our decision making can be like Paul's. We do not need to strive to hear from God the exact plans He has so we can pronounce them to everyone listening. We do not need to say, "God told me" before we talk about a decision we have made. No. Paul says there are some things I am not sure of yet. We will see how they shake out.

And all of that is ok.

Then look what else Paul says.

24 But I trust in the Lord that I myself shall also come shortly

Here again we have that "trust in the Lord" phrase.

But look what Paul says. He **too** is going to show up in Philippi. He says shortly but we already looked at how long that was going to be. But it was going to be **as shortly** as Paul could make it.

This is really a wonderful example of true leadership.

Some people view leadership as having enough authority that you can **delegate** all the work to someone else so you can avoid the lions share of the work. Now there is no crime to **delegate** something. But we are never to use people to simply make our lives easier at their expense. That is never good leadership. Leadership says this thing is important. It needs done. It is important enough for me to do. Maybe I am not qualified to do it. Maybe my life is absorbed with other things that are things that I **should** prioritize and my time is limited. Maybe I simply cannot do the thing. But **I would if I could**.

But since it would be wiser not to, I will send you.

But if it gets to where I **can** do this thing, **I will**.

That is leadership that people will follow. Timothy already knew Paul's heart. He already knew that Paul would go to Philippi if he could. So for Timothy to go in Paul's stead was an honor. Paul understood how to lead people.

Also, how do you think the Philippians felt? Would they not be pleased to know that Paul is not sending Timothy because it is **more convenient** for Paul. Paul is sending Timothy because **he must** right now. But when circumstances change **Paul will also come**. The Philippians are that important to Paul.

When we see needs, the only reason to pass them on to someone else is if we are incapable at the moment of meeting the need or someone is more capable of meeting it. **Ministers minister**.

So this morning I hope we are challenged to **be like Timothy**. And I hope we have been given **hope** by his example that the path to usefulness is not complicated. It is simply getting up and faithfully doing the next thing. Then over time we develop a proven track record where we can be **called upon** to go meet a need. And the more we do it, the more competent we get at it. Until we become irreplaceably relied upon by our leaders.

I love Timothy. I look at many other people in scripture and I think, I am simply not wired that way. I will never be like them. But I look at Timothy and think, hey, if God can change this **timid kid** into a person of **great importance** and **usefulness** in the kingdom of God, I probably have a chance too. All we need to do is show up for service every day with an attitude that says, "Yes Lord, whatever you say." That is something every one of us can do. **God is still making unremarkable people remarkably useful**.