

No one like him

- Philippians 2:19-24
- The rest of chapter two seems like an interruption to the letter, in some ways. Why all of a sudden does Paul give them a travel report? 'Ok, so Epaphroditus is with you now, otherwise you wouldn't be reading this letter, and I know you want me to send Timothy, and I will, but not now. Soon, but not now.' Usually Paul puts his travel plans at the end of the letter: to Titus he wrote at the end of the letter, "Do your best to come to me at Nicopolis, for I have decided to spend the winter there. Do your best to speed Zenas the lawyer and Apollos on their way; see that they lack nothing." But here in the letter to the Philippians, Paul puts travel issues in dead center. Why? Well, I think in part it is these two men illustrate and exemplify what Paul has been writing about since the end of chapter 1. He told them to make sure they are living lives that are worthy of the Gospel. And that they are striving side by side for the Christ. Be of one mind, Paul says, and have the same love for one another. Then he ratchets it up when he tells them to do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility to count others more significant than themselves. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also to the interests of others. He then points to Christ as our ultimate example and speaks of the Lord's self-humiliation and super-exaltation. Therefore, Paul continues, obey the Lord as you work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. Do all things without grumbling or disputing, so that you may shine as lights in the world, holding fast to the Gospel.
- THEN Paul moves from imperatives and instructions to illustrations. He points to two men as examples of what he has been encouraging the Philippians to do and to be. Mark Twain said "There's nothing more annoying than a good example." But the Bible would disagree, and we can all say with confidence that we need examples to look to, people we know who are doing it, who are walking the walk, not just talking the talk. D.A. Carson said, "Much Christian character is as much caught as taught – that is, it is picked up by constant association with mature Christians... Modeling, modeling: it takes place all the time, whether we take it into account or not." Jesus chose 12 men early in His ministry, "so that they might be with Him and that he might send them out to preach." We cannot walk with Jesus in the flesh like they did, nor has anyone since His ascension, but He has not left us alone; He has given us His Spirit. He also puts us where He wants us, in the presence of mature believers from whom we can learn, and grow. Timothy and Epaphroditus were two such men, and though we don't want to elevate them beyond reason, we need to see them as Paul did, as examples for our own faith. Let's look at Timothy today, and Lord willing, we will learn from Epaphroditus' example next week. Three words I would use to describe Timothy from what Paul writes about him here: he is available, compassionate, and teachable. I didn't intend to create the acronym ACT, but if it helps you remember how we are to be best used as we serve the Lord, let's ACT this way, by being available, compassionate, and teachable.
- **Available**
- "I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon." Before we talk about Timothy, notice that Paul models something important for each of us. He says, "I hope in the Lord." Paul bows to the will of the Lord in everything he does, and the decision whether or not to send Timothy is not his to make. "I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon." Verse 23, "I hope therefore to send him." Verse 24, "and I trust in the Lord that shortly I myself will come also." Remember what Paul said about being in prison, in chapter 1, verse 16? "I am put here for the defense of the Gospel." Paul's life did not belong to him, and neither did Timothy's life belong to him. Paul submits everything he does to the will of the Lord. What do we see first in Timothy that is also necessary for all who will serve the Lord and this generation?
- He was available. Timothy was ready and willing to go and serve. We are studying Jonah on our home group right now. Let me ask you something: was Jonah ready and willing to serve the Lord? No. When the word of the Lord first came to Jonah, he was not available. He got on a ship going in

the polar opposite direction to where the Lord had told him to go. Anybody in here ever do that? I have. You don't need a ship to disobey the Lord, do you? Just a stubborn and sinful heart.

- Some people might say, "Well, I will serve the Lord, as soon as He brings something big my way. I mean, I need to serve LARGE." Let me ask you something. What was Timothy going to do for Paul, here? Be an errand boy. Same with Epaphroditus, who had been sent to Paul from Philippi with a gift, and was sent back from Paul with this letter. Timothy was going to come and see how the Philippian church was doing and, Paul hoped, bring back good news that would cheer the old apostle's heart. You say, "That doesn't sound like much." But it was. For Paul, it meant that he would have his needs met with the gift that Epaphroditus brought, and be encouraged the news that Timothy would bring to cheer his heart. For the Philippians, it meant much needed instruction, and the joy of seeing their beloved Epaphroditus again. For us, it means that we have the word of God in this letter to the Philippians! It was a little thing with huge consequences for these two men to run errands. And here's the thing. It is in being available to do the little things where others see your "proven worth," and you find yourself being entrusted with more important things to do. Are you available to serve the Lord here at Antioch? Are you looking around for people who need encouragement, and then going out of your way to do that? Are you available for home group, seeking that 'constant association with mature Christians,' to use DA Carson's words, and are you also seeking to serve there? Are there ways you could serve the church even if it's setting up chairs or keeping things clean or in working order? Are there ministries we are already doing that you could help with? You have heard it before, but it is still true: God is not looking for your ability but for your availability.
- Perhaps the number one reason why many Christians are not available to be used by the Lord is expressed in verse 21. "For they all seek their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ." Available people look out not only for their own interests, but also for the interests of others. That brings us to the second quality we see in Timothy: he was compassionate.
- **Compassionate**
- Verse 20: "For I have no one like him, who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare." An available person is not useful to the ministry of the church unless that available person is also genuinely concerned for others. You don't want someone keeping the nursery who doesn't like babies, no matter how available she is! Or someone visiting the sick who is going to grumble and complain before, during and after making the visit!
- It's an amazing statement from Paul, that in all the church in Rome, Paul knew of no one like Timothy, who was genuinely concerned for the welfare of others. There were people who were not quite as timid as Timothy. People who didn't have his stomach issues. People who were not as young. But those were not limiters. No, the problem, the limiter, was that they did not care enough about other people. I say with shame that it has been a cause of tears in my marriage on more than one occasion, when I did not show genuine concern and compassion for people. You all know that there are people who are much more task-oriented than others, and we are continually frustrated by people who don't get things done as quickly as we do. But these same people we tend to look down on are usually much more relational, and much quicker to stop their "all-important" task and tend to someone's MORE important need. Listen, saints. We need each other, but mostly we task-oriented people need to be more like you relational people. There IS a balance! I am not saying that if you are relational, it's fine if you never complete a task. No, God called us to do good works, the ones He has prepared for us, and it glorifies Him for us to do that and do it well, But we need balance and maturity. Jesus has it perfectly, and we must work toward His example. So, I learn from my wife and many of you, about how to genuinely love people. Thank you for your patience with me.
- Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote, "We must be ready to allow ourselves to be interrupted by God. God will be constantly crossing our paths and canceling our plans by sending us people with claims and petitions...It is a stranger thing that Christians frequently consider their work so important or

urgent that they will allow nothing to disturb them. They think they are doing God a service in this, but actually they are disdainful of God's 'crooked yet straight path.'"

- Timothy was available. He was compassionate. And he was...
- **Teachable**
- I remember one of the African pastors in Kenya telling me that he was looking for more fat people to work with in his village. My eyebrows went up because I didn't remember seeing ANY fat people in his village. He laughed and said, "FAT stands for faithful, available, and teachable." Maybe he'd been reading about Timothy as well. This last quality, teachable, is an anchor, isn't it? If we are available, and we are genuinely concerned for others, but we are NOT teachable, that becomes a deal-breaker. Back to Jonah: once God got his attention and gave Jonah a whale of a headache, and Jonah became available again, he went to Ninevah and delivered the message God gave him to deliver. The people repented and God relented from destroying the city, and there was a great revival in this pagan land. And then? Jonah got angry. He didn't want God to forgive them. He wasn't genuinely concerned for their welfare, was he? **Look at Jonah 4.** Here in the last chapter, God tries to teach his prophet, asking Jonah, "Do you do well to be angry?" Jonah doesn't answer; instead he stomps out of the city and sits down and pouts. God causes a plant to grow up and it shades Jonah in the heat, and Jonah is a happy little camper. Then God attacks the plant and it dies, and the heat strikes Jonah with a vengeance, and again he complains to God and asks if he could just die, himself. God says, you pitied the plant, for which you did not labor...And should I not pity Ninevah...?" We don't know the rest of the story, but we know that at that point, Jonah was lacking this important quality. He was not teachable.
- How do we know Timothy was teachable? One clue is in verse 22, "how as a son with a father he has served with me in the gospel." Watch a little boy with his father, how he imitates his dad's walk, and how his dad throws a ball. When his dad is working in the yard, his little boy will be out there with his toy shovel, working alongside him. And when his father kneels in the living room and folds his hands to pray, his little boy is kneeling beside him, folding his hands and squinting out of one eye at his dad, who is talking to his Father. That's modeling. That's what Paul had done for Timothy, and the young disciple had spent time with his father in the faith in every aspect of ministry. He had seen Paul teach and heard him pray and watched how he loved people and cared for their needs. Timothy had developed the same set of skills, so when Paul writes, "I have no one like Timothy," he is saying, "Hey, there's nobody I could send to you that will care for you like I would, except Timothy."
- How do you know if you are teachable? It's simple: you can be taught. You look to be taught. You want to be taught. You long to be taught. Simply stated? **Teachable people learn.**
- You know, Micah and I have been on mission trips together 4 or 5 times, starting with a trip to Haiti when Micah was only a young teenager. But the trip we took to Moldova this summer was different. We didn't go as father and son, though that made quite an impression on the men we spoke to; we went as co-laborers for the sake of the Gospel. And I remember on several occasions when someone was asking us a question and Micah would answer it first, he said almost exactly what I was thinking. Not because he has become just like me: no, he is a much better man in many ways. But because he is teachable, and has watched me, and other men in this church who have been like fathers to him. And what God put in him over these many years came out as a blessing to the church in Moldova.
- **Available.** Maybe it starts there for some of you. Make yourself available. **Compassionate.** Ask God to increase your love for people, but don't wait until you feel something before you start doing works of love and service for others. **Teachable.** Watch how others serve and love, and learn from them.
- **Prayer**
- Communion