



CAPITOL COMMISSION

Models of Character and Service—Philippians 2.12-18

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PHILIPPIANS: CULTIVATING A CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE AT THE CAPITOL

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INTRODUCTION

“Watch and learn,” “follow me and do what I do,” “like father, like son.” These and so many other phrases serve to point out the power of modeling behavior as a means of training. Apprenticeship or internship programs, and even ‘Big Brothers/Big Sisters,’ are based upon the idea of modeling behavior. One of the most powerful ways to learn is by watching someone model the skills or behaviors we need to learn. These days we talk a lot about role models and mentors.

In Philippians 2.19-30, Paul moves from a discussion of the pursuit of spiritual growth, which is essentially following the example of Christ, to providing a few more examples worthy of imitation. Timothy and Epaphroditus are set before us as models of proven character and dedicated service.

Philippians 2.19-30—But I trust in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you shortly, that I also may be encouraged when I know your state, for I have no one else like-minded, who will sincerely care for your state. For all seek their own, not the things which are of Christ Jesus. But you know his proven character, that as a son with his father, he served with me in the gospel. Therefore, I hope to send him at once, as soon as I see how it goes with me. But I trust in the Lord that I myself shall also come shortly. Yet I considered it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother, fellow worker, and fellow soldier, but your messenger and the one who ministered to my need; since he was longing for you all and was distressed because you had heard that he was sick. For indeed he was sick almost unto death; but God had mercy on him, and not only on him but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow. Therefore I sent him the more eagerly, that when you see him again you may rejoice and I may be less sorrowful. Receive him therefore in the Lord with all gladness, and hold such men in esteem; because for the work of Christ he came close to death, not regarding his life, to supply what was lacking in your service toward me.

I. PROVEN CHARACTER (19-24)

Paul displays Timothy for our observation as a model of character against a backdrop of the deficiency of character found among those surrounding him.

DEFICIENCY OF CHARACTER

Paul offers a stinging indictment of those around him—“For all seek their own.” Yet we readily recognize this as a description of virtually everyone with whom we deal from day to day. Paul had a great many apprentices over the course of his ministry whom he would surely commend for an important errand, but at this time it seems that Timothy and Epaphroditus are the only partners in ministry he considers trustworthy. He had seen many sign up for training only to wash out—only to abandon the work when things got tough. Now these two stand alone as Paul’s kindred, bound by a common concern for the things of Christ.

DEMONSTRATION OF CHARACTER

“But you know his proven character...” These believers to whom Paul writes knew Timothy not in name only, nor simply by face, but as to his inward quality as well. They had seen how Timothy not only followed the lead of his mentor, Paul, but how he shared his sincere concern for others and for the work of the gospel. Paul portrayed his understudy Timothy as his only like-minded partner in the work. Looking out also for the interest of others, as commended in verse four, is a signature quality of Timothy’s work.

He served as a son with his father—picturing loyalty and depth of relationship. Paul and Timothy’s relationship is characterized by the mutual devotion of a son to his father and of a father to his son. Paul’s sincere concern for the spiritual condition of these believers and for the things which are of Christ Jesus have been fully embraced by his spiritual son, Timothy. Proven character here denotes that which has been purified and strengthened by testing. Timothy had been tested and proven to Paul and to those to whom he now sends him.

BIBLE STUDIES (MEALS PROVIDED)

LEGISLATORS ONLY: WEDNESDAY @ LUNCH AT THE AUSTIN CLUB (11:30A.M. OR UPON ADJOURNMENT, WHICHEVER IS LATER) OR THURSDAYS @ 7:30 A.M. IN THE MEMBERS’ LOUNGE (E2.1002)

CAPITOL COMMUNITY (ALL ARE WELCOME): FRIDAYS @ 8:00A.M. IN THE MEMBERS’ LOUNGE (E2.1002)

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II. DEDICATED SERVICE (25-30)

Whereas Paul set forth Timothy as a model of proven character, he commends Epaphroditus as a model of service. Paul recommended Timothy, with a glowing character reference, and he now provides what one scholar describes as a nomination speech on behalf of Epaphroditus. He lists his previous roles of service and details his accomplishments and dedication to the tasks given to him.

ASSUMING THE ROLE OF A SERVANT

Epaphroditus is presented to those who sent him, and to whom he now returns as Paul's brother, his co-laborer, and his comrade-in-arms, as well as, the Philippians messenger and the one who served the needs of Paul as their representative. Timothy was presented as a son to Paul, yet Epaphroditus is presented by Paul as his equal. Paul was a servant to Christ and to the Philippians. Epaphroditus was his peer in this role.

Epaphroditus had been commissioned by the Philippian believers to the role of servant and he had dedicated himself to the task admirably. He had done all that the circumstances required of him and more. He had not become disinterested in the simple tasks with which he had been charged, namely, to deliver certain gifts to Paul and serve him in the most menial ways. He had not entangled himself in distractions or selfish pursuits that might have satisfied his own interests or preferences. He was not too proud to serve those who sent him by serving Paul.

EXPRESSING THE ATTITUDES OF A SERVANT

Epaphroditus must be sent to them at once, because he yearned to be reunited with them and was deeply moved by their anxiety over his reported sickness. Paul removes all cause for interpreting Epaphroditus's return as an abdication of his duties. He was not sent home because he had neglected his duties, but instead because of his dedication to them. His dedication to work of Christ had nearly cost him his life.

In light of his duties he had no regard for his own life, so Paul must direct him to return home. To have lost his fellow soldier in the line of duty would have caused sorrow upon sorrow for Paul. Yet he now rejoices that he has been spared, and the believers to whom he returns should share in that rejoicing at his return.

Paul concludes this nomination speech by urging these believers to a sense of duty towards the one who had served them so faithfully. They were to receive him in the Lord with all gladness, and to have the highest regard for men such as him. He was an example for others to follow—a true role model for dedicated service. He was sent to supply what was lacking in their service toward Paul. He had fulfilled this role with the utmost in dedicated service.

CONCLUSION

Throughout history, those who have displayed the most noble character and have dedicated themselves to serving the interests of others have pointed to the example of others as that which inspired their own pursuits. You could easily say that every Timothy had his Paul and that every Paul had his Timothy. Models of character and service are a means of grace in the life of every Christian.

- Who would you identify as mentors in years past?
- Who do you currently hold as a model or example, worthy of imitation?
- Who are you mentoring?
- Are there 'faithful men' or women to whom you are entrusting the things which have been handed down to you in your development and growth as a believer?