

**Intro** There is significant force for change and influence in looking to others as models or examples. The power of following someone's example is actually life changing. We are a nation of people who look to examples with almost 'religious' fervor and expectations. Professional athletes, media and music stars and wealthy business people end up defining for many what success is. The power of influence is enormous when people find other people with common values and follow them.

The principle of imitation or following the example of someone is a key part of a growing partnership in the gospel. Not all gospel ministry is verbal, prominent or planned. The follower of Christ must include the spiritual discipline of hanging out with godly people, following the example of others farther down the road and setting himself up to be influenced by the right people.

Several years ago, here at Kossuth Street we learned that Jesus approached discipleship, or a partnership in the gospel, with the following invitations: Come and see, come and follow me and come and be with me. Jesus considered the time his followers spent with him as crucial to their development in faith and obedience. It is this same principle of spiritual development that the Apostle now teaches the Philippian believers. To progress in advancing the gospel, these believers had to find and follow others they could imitate.

Note that Paul already has taught us to model our attitude after the example of Jesus Christ (2:5). In the passage before us today and over the next few weeks we will focus on identifying and exposing ourselves to people who will influence us to follow the example of Christ. While today we are looking at 2:19-30, we need a quick glance at 3:17 to set our course.

*Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us.*

This command teaches us that God uses people to help us follow Christ. God wants us to look for, honor and imitate other believers. God has provided in church leaders and others an example for us to follow. Without godly examples to find and follow, the life of the church is at great risk.

Another statement from our passage that helps us establish the meaning of these paragraphs is found in 2:29:

*So receive him in the Lord with all joy, and honor such men.*

These, along with many other passages that we will address in the coming weeks, make it clear that you and I must have gospel partners that we intentionally hang out with for the purpose of being influenced toward Christ-likeness. The 'lone ranger' approach, the 'I can or should be able to figure it out myself' mentality and the 'it's just me and God' attitude are proud, wrong and dangerous. Let's ask God to help us hear him well about finding and following gospel partners who will influence us toward greater Christ-likeness. It is a major way the gospel advances.

Our study for the next four weeks, we hope in the Lord Jesus, will look like this:

Find and Follow gospel partners who . . .

1. Value serving others.
2. Have proven obedience.
3. Boast in Christ alone.
4. Continue to grow in faith.

## Philippians 2:19-30

Note that Paul has two purposes in mind as he communicates to the Philippian church regarding Timothy and Epaphroditus. One, these are close and personal friends so Paul shares details of health, mission success and travel schedules. Two, he intentionally sets them up as examples for the Philippian believers to follow. He does this in two ways.

One, he directly admonishes them in 2:29 to welcome and honor them. This along with the clear command of 3:17 motivates us in the same way. Second, Paul links the example of Christ in 2:5-11 with both Timothy and Epaphroditus by repetition of terms and concepts from the example of Christ. Do you want to know what the mind of Christ looks like? Look at the genuine concern for others, the servant like work, the sacrificial service and the life risking obedience of these two men. Look, lock in on it and follow their example. It will lead you to Christ and the advance of the gospel through your light and sacrifice.

### Find and follow gospel partners who . . .

#### 1. Value serving others. 2:19-30

Note the common theme in both of these examples of putting others interests ahead of their own. This behavior and mindset has been addressed directly and by example in 2:1-11. The influence by example of those who consider their interests more important than the concerns of others is considerable and multiplying all around us.

What does humbly considering the interests of others as more significant than yours look like? Well it looks like the life and death of Christ. It also looks like the genuine concern of Timothy and the intense service of Epaphroditus. Look for people partners in the gospel who view others in these ways:

#### a. Their concern for others is genuine. 20-21

Genuine concern in these verses and in Timothy's life is seen as . . .

- Distinguished in depth. V20 'I have no one equal in soul'
- Consuming in care. V20 'genuinely concerned' 'anxious' 4:6
- Christ focused in practice. V21 'those of Jesus Christ'

Illus. Timothy circumcision Acts 16:1-5

#### b. Their service for others is intense. 25-26

Intensity of service is seen in Epaphroditus life in two ways:

- His service was comprehensive. v25 5 terms to describe his service
- His service was personal. V26 longing and distress

Find and follow gospel partners who . . .

1. Value serving others. 2:19-30

**2. Have proven obedience.** 2:19-30

Note that attention is drawn to these two men as examples because they both have proven their faithfulness to God over time and in stressful circumstances. These are not quitters. Both Timothy and Epaphroditus have been tested and approved through testing. Following Christ through hard and difficult times is quite challenging. You need to find and follow some gospel partners who know what it is like to find strength, joy and hope in extended hard times.

Two areas of proven obedience are . . .

**a. Proven in gospel ministry.** 22 served with me in the gospel

Paul has a perspective on Timothy from time spent in travel, evangelizing, preaching and serving the churches. He commends Timothy as a person who has been tested and approved in the crucial area of the work of gospel ministry. Two areas stand out in Paul's commendation.

- A proven follower. As a son with a father; has served
- A proven focus. In the gospel

Illus. 2Thess.3:6-13

**b. Proven in hardship.** 27-30

Timothy was a great example of a hard gospel worker. Epaphroditus was a great example of someone who endured hardship without quitting. You need an example like this to challenge and rebuke the easy going kind of Christianity that makes no stern demands, calls for no self-effacing sacrifice or requires extreme self denial. Note two concepts that describe this kind of person you need to find and follow. Note that these qualities have been proven in the midst of near death sickness in Epaphroditus life.

- Risk taker. 30
- A finisher. 30

Illus. Rom. 16:3-4

Find and Follow gospel partners who . . .

1. Value serving others.
2. Have proven obedience.
3. Boast in Christ alone.
4. Continue to grow in faith.

**Conclusion** As we remember Christ together at his table, please express your gratitude for the people in your life that serve as examples and models for you in your growing love and obedience to Christ. As you take time now to prepare your heart and express your gratitude, reflect on your need for examples, models, and mentors. Are you active in finding and following people who serve and are proven in the way the scriptures teach us today?

One reason the gospel is the good news is because it tells us the truth in plain terms about God, people, Jesus and hope . . . all of these truths are represented in the Lord's Supper . . .

### Study Questions

1. What impressions or decisions did you come to as a result of the teaching of God's Word today?
2. Read Philippians 2:19-30; 3:17-18 as a group. Review the two ways Paul intentionally sets these men out as examples for us to follow (top of page 2 notes).
3. Who are some of the most effective examples of Christ likeness in your life? Why? How have they specifically influenced you to serve others or endure trouble?
4. Do you find your conclusions are similar to the Apostle's in 2:20-21? Are most people at KSBC less than outstanding in their concern for others? Why? Based on our study today, what is a solution for this? How can your group increase the number of Timothy like models at KSBC?
5. Review the 5 terms Paul uses to describe Epaphroditus in vs. 25. What do they mean? What do they say about the relationship between these two gospel partners? Examine the terms Paul uses about Timothy in v 22. Who can you talk that way about in your life? Who have you served hard with that you appreciate as a son, a fellow worker, a fellow soldier, a brother?
6. What do Epaphroditus 2:20 and Prisca & Aquila (Rom.16:3-5) have in common? What does that kind of commitment look like today? What is the difference between foolish risk taking and risk taking faith?
7. What are some practical ways that you can find and follow gospel partners like these men in Philippians 2? What do you have to stop doing in order to start hanging out with people like this?