

# A Gospel Model (2)

## Philippians 2:19-30

Preached at 8.15 and C@10 on 1<sup>st</sup> March 2015

### Intro

Christian pastor, lecturer and author Don Carson has a story about when he was a student at university.

He and a friend started a Bible study to help their unbelieving friends to hear the gospel.

They had another friend at uni who'd been a Christian longer than them, who they used to take anyone with questions they felt they were out of their depth with. This man's name was Dave.

One day Don took a friend to see Dave.

Dave asked him "why did you come to see me?"

The man answered that he'd grown up in a good, loving home where he was taught to be polite and hard-working – and he wanted to know what, apart from a lot of abstract theology, that Christians have that he didn't have.

Dave looked at him for a few seconds, and then said "watch me!"

Don's friend said "what?"

Dave said "Watch me! Come and live with me for a month if you want. Watch what I do when I get up, what I do when I'm on my own, how I work, how I use my time, how I talk to people, what my values are. Come with me wherever I go and tell me at the end of the month if there's any difference."

You might not have ever extended an invitation like that formally to anyone.

But there will be a number of people in all of our lives who do see and observe our lives, knowing that we call ourselves 'Christian'.

Like many things in life, the Christian life is as much caught as it is taught.

We didn't have to teach our kids how to speak with a western-Sydney Australian accent. They learned to speak by copying our example and the example of their friends.

So children of Christians will 'catch' the Christian life from the example of their parents when they observe us going about our daily lives – how they see us act when we're not around other people... how we speak to other people when they are around... our priorities with our time, etc.

But it's not just children we're talking about.

If you're a Christian, think about the people or perhaps one person especially that you caught the Christian life from... who modelled the Christian life for you?

How did you learn to pray? Who showed you what it meant to be generous? Who modelled the importance of church to you? What was it about the way they made decisions that has shaped the way you make decisions about your life and priorities?

And then, as we look at this passage today, think about yourself as someone who is modelling the Christian life for others – because you are, whether you like it or not.

In this passage we get a look at two men whose lives are a model for other Christians to follow.

But not just so that we can admire them and say "aren't they great!"

Their model of living out the gospel is the normal Christian life. It's what it means to have the same mind as Jesus Christ.

It's the life we should all be modelling to each other, to new people at church, and to the people around us every day.

### **Modelling Other-person-centredness**

Firstly, let's look at Timothy.

Paul says in v22 that he's like a son to him – that he's served with Paul in the ministry of the gospel like a son with his father.

In that time sons would usually follow their father into his trade or profession and work alongside him – like Jesus would have worked as a carpenter alongside Joseph.

Timothy worked alongside Paul in spreading the good news about Jesus. He'd been with Paul when he preached the gospel in Philippi and planted the church there.

They were hard times. Paul and his helpers were persecuted. Timothy had proved himself serving alongside Paul through hardship as the church was established.

And he still has the same concern for the people there that Paul has.

Paul says he has no one else like Timothy with him who takes a genuine interest in the welfare of the Philippians Christians.

Timothy models a genuine interest in the well-being of others.

Where does that come from?

We saw in last week's passage that it comes from following the model of Jesus – who put all self-interest and comfort aside and became a servant for the good of others.

Timothy was a leader, and his model of other-person-centred leadership is a given for anyone in any sort of leadership in the church.

The day that it's beneath me to cheerfully pick up after others, or help in the kitchen, or miss lunch because someone needs to talk, or help someone out with a few dollars is the day I shouldn't be a leader.

Because that's the model we all have in Jesus.

And so we model for each other what that genuine interest in the well-being of others looks like in our church.

Friends, the most basic thing we can do if we're genuinely interested in each others well-being is be here at church every week.

Timothy was about to travel from Rome to Philippi to find out how the Philippian Christians were going... 1,300km on foot! Weeks of journeying.

That's a genuine interest in other people!

We only have to travel 5, 10 or 20km to find out how our brothers and sisters are going, and what we can do to help and serve them – or even just get to know them?

In v21 Paul says the general rule is that everyone looks out for their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ.

But the interests of Jesus Christ are the people he came to die to save.

And so to have the same mind as Jesus means we'll be looking out for the well-being – spiritual and otherwise – of those Jesus died to save... starting with those who are already here in church, and going out to those who aren't here yet.

Timothy is a model to emulate, because he's emulating Christ. He models the genuine Christian life – he lives the gospel – as he takes a genuine interest in the lives of others before his own interests.

The wonderful irony here is that we think that by putting our own interests first we'll be better off.

But if we all follow the model Jesus set and copy him, we'll all be better off – because it's not just me looking out for my interests – it's all of you! And you have everyone else looking out for yours!

That's the way God intended us to live. And his way delivers the best result for all of us.

A church full of people learning to look out for each others' best interests will look very different from the world around us.

So look for the people you see here at church who are genuinely interested in the welfare of others – in your well-being.

And learn – catch this aspect of the genuine Christian life so that you can model it to others.

### **Modelling suffering service**

Finally, let's look at Epaphroditus.

Epaphroditus came to Paul as a messenger to Paul from the Philippian church (v25 says Paul is sending him 'back').

Timothy will be coming to the Philippians as soon as there's some news about Paul's predicament in prison to take back to them.

But in v25 Paul's sending Epaphroditus back to them right now.

Listen to the depth of genuine concern and love these people have for each other. In v26 Epaphroditus is distressed that his church family back in Philippi are concerned for him because they've heard that he nearly lost his life on the mission they sent him on to take care of Paul's needs.

So Paul wants to send him back so that they will be glad to have him back with them, and so that Paul himself will be less worried about them!

I've just been blown away again in these last few weeks of illness how many people in this church and in our home church at Panania who I know are not doing as well as me, who are distressed to hear that I haven't been well.

Epaphroditus almost died (v30) for the work of Christ.

And Paul says 'honour people like him.' In other words, model yourselves on his example.

Model yourselves on people who live in a manner worthy of the gospel... who live by faith in Jesus and expend themselves on serving him.

In v30 the word translated 'help' – as in 'the help that the Philippians couldn't give Paul' (because they were too far away) is a word that means roughly 'worship'.

And when Paul talks about the worship that Christians offer, he's talking about us giving up our lives as a sacrifice to God.

So in Romans 12 he says:

*“Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship.” (Romans 12:1 NIV)*

'Worship' in this sense affects all of life... it's consistently offering all our life, time, energy, body and resources to God.

Epaphroditus came from Philippi to Paul to give up whatever it took to serve the interests of Jesus Christ, by serving Paul in gospel ministry.

And Paul holds him up to the Philippians – and to us – as the model of the genuine Christian life of worship.

The genuine Christian life works out in practice in self-sacrificial service to God (worship) including promoting the gospel for the good of others.

The true life of God-centred worship for the good of others is the only true worship – the worship that the gospel demands.

...because that IS the gospel – that's what Jesus has done – giving up his life as a sacrifice to God for our good.

He is our model. Paul, Timothy and Epaphroditus are models of Jesus.

God has given us many models in our lives and in this church through the years.

It's our privilege to model their example in our own lives.

Everyone who knows we're a Christian will see us as a model of the Christian life.

But we need to – with the help of God's Spirit and informed by his word – model the genuine Christian life, or we're not modelling it at all.

And everyone who comes into our church – or our children as they look to us as models – won't catch the Christian life unless we're modelling ours on others who model their life on Christ.

## Exhortation

This week, at home or as you talk in your Growth Group, ask yourself or each other how you see God-centred all of life worship for the good of others in your life?

What areas might you, with God's help, need to change?

How are you modelling godly speech that builds others up rather than tears them down? Do your words and tone of voice have more to do with your own interests or the interests of Jesus Christ – i.e. the other people at church who Jesus died for?

What does the frequency of your church attendance – apart from illness and holidays – tell you and others about your genuine interest in their welfare?

Are you conscious of being a godly role model for others to follow?

Could you say to someone else at church 'watch me – follow my example'?

We know that none of us will be perfect models this side of heaven – but that doesn't mean that we shouldn't be striving, with God's help, to do the best we can at emulating Jesus.

When we fail, we have the assurance of forgiveness and grace to keep trying.

In fact, the power of modelling repentance to those who are watching us can't be overstated – ask my kids!

Take a moment to reflect on what you can work on this week – what change of attitude and behaviour that will make it more obvious to you and those watching you that your faith in Jesus really does make a difference... then quietly pray about it.