

5-5-24

Chip Off the Old Block

Philippians 2

It's been said that imitation is the best form of flattery. This is why my daughters openly laugh when they see their younger brother imitating their dad. I'll put on my baseball cap; Calem puts his on.

Sunglasses? Check.

Work gloves? Check.

It's actually scary how much little boys want to imitate their dads. Hopefully we give them the right things to copy.

Obviously, Timothy had a dad, but we know nothing about him, except that in Acts 16, Timothy's mom is described as a Jewish Christian and his dad, a Greek / Gentile with no reference of his coming to faith.

Add to this, the fact that Timothy was uncircumcised until he was a young man, and we can be fairly certain that his dad was an unbeliever.

But this doesn't mean that Timothy didn't want to imitate him. Most little boys want to be like their dads, and for the most part, this is a good thing.

For Timothy, life was probably filled early and often with all sorts of social challenges. He would have been considered a heathen by both Jews and Christians alike, and when these differences are seized upon by one's peer group, life can become quite challenging, to say the least. Just ask any teenager who has struggled to fit in with a particular social group.

Whatever the case, under Jewish law, the union between Timothy's dad and mom would have been viewed as illegal and the Christian church would most likely have frowned upon their marriage as well.

Let's just say that Timothy's mother was probably not an overly strict observer of Judaism either when she got married or before she became a Christian. It's this world that Timothy entered and grew up in to become one of Paul's closest companion and friend.

Paul describes Timothy as one who had *"proved himself, because as a son with his father, he has served with me in the work of the gospel."*

Timothy *"proved himself as a son with his father, he has served me in the work of the gospel."*

Has anyone here had the unique experience and privilege of working side by side with his/ her father?

Can you relate to this sort of relationship?

I know I can, and I know many of you can too.

Though it's been over twenty - five since my father passed, it doesn't take much for me to find myself back on the farm, at my father's side working with him, learning from him, and trying to prove myself to him.

I learned a lot of things from my dad, like the names and uses of many different types of tools – a crescent wrench, a socket wrench, and an Allen wrench. (I was his official "gofer" when he was under a machine trying to repair it.)

He showed me how to properly use a crowbar so I could easily pry nails up out of a board if I applied the proper leverage in the right direction.

He bestowed upon me the valuable knowledge I needed to drive a stick shift since all the tractors and the truck on the farm were manual transmissions. (This last piece of information was especially handy when we needed to jump start a tractor. I'd hop on one tractor and he on the other and before you knew it, the Old International was humming along once again.)

It made me feel good when I could help him in this way. Perhaps I proved myself to him in some way.

But the thing I learned most about my dad was that he was doing exactly what God had made him to do.

Sometimes, I tried, with great difficulty, to imagine my dad having another career besides farming, and every time I tried, my mind would become totally blank!

Banker? No way!

Teacher? Not in a structured classroom setting.

Police officer? Well, he was an MP in the army for a while, but I never got the impression that he was big on enforcing the rules. He left that to my mom.

God made him a farmer, and that was what he was through and through.

Now this doesn't mean he always liked being a farmer. There were days I did everything in my power to stay as far away as possible from him because he was not having a good day being a farmer, but for the most part dad accepted, embraced, and was content with his calling.

Are we able to say the same?

This is probably one of the big reasons Paul had such confidence in Timothy. He was good at what he did because he was sure God had called him to the mission.

Listen to Paul's words to Timothy in the second letter he personally wrote to him. I summarize here: *Timothy, I pray for you every day. I am so encouraged when I think about you and your faith that was handed down to you from your grandmother and mother at a very early age.*

Now exercise this gift God has given you, which I recognized in you, so that you can be a powerful, loving, and self-disciplined man who honors God with his life and work.

Wow, talk about a blast of encouragement! We all need this sort of encouragement if we are to experience the potential God desires for each of us.

In the past, I'm sure you remember me mentioning how Paul's letter to the Philippians is characterized and sprinkled throughout with thoughts of joy and thanksgiving: *"I thank my God every time I remember you. I always pray with joy because of your partnership in the gospel... because all of you share in God's grace with me."*

This is extremely encouraging, but I think Paul's thankfulness and encouragement reaches new heights when he writes about Timothy, whom he considers his spiritual son. Why else would he write, *"I have no one else like him, who takes a genuine interest in your welfare. Everyone else looks to his own interests, not those of Christ Jesus."*

Can anyone think of a greater complement for a Christian? I sure can't.

In other words, Paul is saying to the Philippians, sharing God's grace with you is a wonderful thing, and the knowledge of this truth brings me great joy, but Timothy's laboring with me for the Gospel brings me even greater joy!

It's not that the Philippian church had done anything wrong. On the contrary, Paul says he looks forward to the day he can boast about them being *"blameless and pure children of God in which you shine like stars in the universe as you hold out the word of life."*

But what he is emphasizing here is that there is an undeniably special and unique bond formed between those who work side by side.

And this is the sort of relationship Paul had with Timothy.

Think about this truth in your own life:

Who do you go to when you need a favor - when you need to borrow a truck, a chainsaw, or hammer?

What if you need a helping hand to mow the lawn or move a heavy piece of furniture?

Don't you typically ask someone who's already been through the war with you?

Someone who's seen you on a regular basis, and has witnessed both your good side and bad?

For me, it's my friend Ted who still lives in Montana.

When I first met Ted, I wasn't quite sure what to make of him. He wore a cowboy hat and played the harmonica, and every time he bought a cup of coffee from McDonalds, he'd share a corny joke with the person behind the counter which always proved to be embarrassing, but despite his quirks, he was always ready and willing to lend a helping hand, whether it was ...

painting the church basement's floor,

installing a new oven in my house,

or me calling him at midnight begging him to come over and help me find the main water shut-off valve while my basement was flooding.

He is my friend, and I can honestly say, I have no one else like him.

I suppose I saw in him what Paul saw in Timothy: someone who took a genuine interest in another's welfare.

Well this leads me to the main point of Philippians chapter 2: Words are good, but actions are better.

Can you see how I came to this conclusion?

Philippians 2 starts out by exhorting the church people to live what they believe! Paul writes, *“If you are encouraged by knowing that you are united with Christ and that you have new life in him - and if you are comforted by his love, knowing that God will never leave nor forsake you - and if you have a new desire in your heart to be compassionate and loving toward your fellow-man, then by all means, act on these promptings, because they are from God!”*

Put your faith into action, Paul says, and in doing so you cannot help but imitate your Savior.

And imitation, as noted earlier, is the best form of flattery.

And when we imitate Christ, we honor him.

It's at this point that Paul introduces six verses of pure unadulterated theology in the form an ancient hymn to make his point which I summarize here:

Be like Christ!

Who being in the very nature of God who had no qualms about relinquishing his high position in order to save humanity.

Though he was creator of the universe, humility was not beneath him.

In fact, he humbled himself to such an extent that he willingly became part of his own creation in order to fulfill his Father's mission.

His humility led to his death, but it also led him to his exaltation.

We should imitate him, because instruction is good, but action is even better.

But Paul's hands are literally tied. He's in jail as he writes this and is not free to visit, and though he sends a letter of encouragement, the real gift he sends comes in the form of Timothy and Epaphroditus.

Instruction is good, but action is better.

This is true of our God as well. In the beginning, God spoke through Moses and through his prophets like Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezra, and Nehemiah.

He spoke to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob as he chose them to be Israel's leaders.

He even wrote his commandments on stone tablets so that even Israel's enemies could see what God stood for, but ultimately it was God's personal actions that paved a way for our salvation.

God's teaching was good, but Christ's coming finished the task.

The Law was good, but Christ came to fulfill the Law, and secure our salvation.

Words are good and bring comfort and encouragement, but Christ's act of love on the cross tore the temple veil in two and gave us access to the Father.

So, Paul sends Timothy and Epaphroditus because words are good, but actions are better and so Paul sends his best.

Two men who have proven themselves to be loyal workers for Christ and for the gospel.

Honor men like them, Paul says, because they've risked their lives to advance the gospel. Honor them because they are men not just filled with words, but with love and action.

Imitation is good. It honors the one imitated.

Paul sends Timothy and Epaphroditus.

The Father sends the Son - and less we forget, the Son sends us.

Do you know that you are sent?

Do you know what I really get a kick out of when it comes to being a father?

It's when my son asks me questions to reassure himself that he's doing the right thing - that he's on the right track. It brings me such pleasure and joy – when he comes outside and says things like ...

“Dad, I saw you working outside, and I came to help you because I noticed you needed help.”

Unless you've personally experienced it, you don't know how that warms a father's heart.

One time one of boys said to me, “Dad, did you pray that you would have a son like me?”

Wow! Talk about the best Father's Day present a father could ever wish for!

This is what Philippians chapter 2 is all about:

Sending our very best, not just with words, but with action.

Let us not forget this truth as we continue to press forward for the Gospel.

The Son has put into our hands the responsibility of advancing the Gospel, and we must take our responsibility seriously and wholeheartedly.

Not long ago I came across the movie Castaway with Tom Hanks.

One of my favorite parts of the movie is when, after nearly four years, Hanks has built his raft with his specialized sail which he found, and he launches it into the surf knowing full well that he has a very small window of opportunity to get past the crashing waves and dangerous shoals of his island out to the open sea.

And just when it looks like all his preparation and planning will be for not as a giant wave is ready to come crashing down on his tiny wooden raft, he lets loose the sail that instantly catches the wind and sends him flying over the last deadly wave. He's now free to sail on into open sea.

But truth be told, it's a catch twenty-two situation. Sure, he's escaped the crashing surf of his island, but now there's no turning back to the relative safety of the island.

Now his only option is getting rescued by a passing ship or succumbing to the harsh elements.

He put all his eggs in one basket and now he must live with the consequences.

So it is with Paul.

He's given everything for the gospel; and has no regrets. He's even says that he's willing to be poured out as drink offering especially if it serves the Philippians' faith.

Jesus imitates his Father in heaven.

Paul desires to imitate his Lord and Savior Jesus.

Timothy and Epaphroditus seek to imitate their spiritual father and mentor. We are to imitate Christ, because imitation is more than just flattery. It's honor, it's love, it's respect, and it's life.

"Your attitude – my attitude – our attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus."