

## INTRODUCTION

In Proverbs 27:17 Solomon writes, “As iron sharpens iron, so a man sharpens the countenance of his friend.” Whenever I need to sharpen my lawnmower blade, I always pull out the metal file. If it’s really dull and badly nicked, I’ll pull out the grinding wheel first and then follow up with the file; putting a real nice edge on the blade. Solomon says that in the same way, “a man sharpens the countenance of his friend.” In other words, as we interact with those closest to us, they have a way of rubbing off on us. That’s why we need to carefully and wisely choose our friends.

In the context, Solomon of course is referring to those who will influence and impact us in a way that honors the Lord. Their lives and their words serve as a file that help remove the rough spots and round off the corners of our lives. No matter what they might see in our lives: the imperfection, the unevenness, and the unsettledness—they continue to love and accept us, because a true “friend loves at all times” (Prov. 17:17). Sometimes it might even feel they’ve pulled out the grinding wheel! But Solomon is right, “Faithful are the wounds of a friend” (Prov. 27:6a).

The people we surround ourselves with says a lot about who we are. It doesn’t matter if you’re the President of the United States, a business owner, a husband or wife, a mom or dad, or the pastor of a church; the people we surround ourselves with says a lot about who we are.

Jesus said, “A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone who is perfectly trained will be like his teacher” (Lke. 6:40). The life they live and the words they speak will rub off on us. They help shape and mold our thinking, our worldview, and our very character.

In chapters 1 and 2 of Philippians we find three men, although their lives were far from perfect, Jesus was certainly rubbing off on them. They were becoming like their Master and Teacher, Jesus Christ. He was honing and conforming their lives more and more into His image. They were imitators of Christ and truly exhibited the mind of Christ. Just as Christ’s attitude was mirrored through His actions in humble submission and sacrifice (Phil. 2:6-8), we clearly see the *Joy of Selfless and Sacrificial Service* through the lives of these three men: Paul, Timothy, and Epaphroditus. In turn, the Philippian church (in order to maintain unity and to be effective in ministry), was to follow their example as well as Christ’s example.

Every believer is intended to be a godly and Christlike role model for others to follow. Paul wrote to the Corinthians:

Therefore I urge you, imitate me. For this reason I have sent Timothy to you, who is my beloved and faithful son in the Lord, who will remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach everywhere in every church.” (1 Cor. 4:16, 17)

Just as Paul was their spiritual father, he now, without any arrogance, urges the Corinthian believers to follow his example. He also reminds them that he has sent to them young Timothy, Paul’s “son in the faith;” Paul’s protégé. More than likely, Paul was at Ephesus and unable to come to Corinth at the time. But he could send Timothy and do so without any reservation. He was quite capable of serving as Paul’s proxy, his representative.

He wrote to Timothy these words: “Let no one despise your youth, but be an example [a “pattern” or “model”] to the believers” (1 Tim. 4:12).

Listen to how Paul instructs Titus, another “son in the faith”:

But as for you [contrary to the false teachers], speak the things which are proper for sound doctrine: that the older men be sober [minded], reverent, temperate, sound in faith, in love, in patience; the older women likewise, that they be reverent in behavior, not slanderers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things—that they admonish the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, *to be* discreet, chaste, homemakers, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be blasphemed. Likewise, exhort the young men to be sober-minded, in all things showing yourself *to be* a pattern of good works. (Titus 2:1-7a)

What’s the point? Titus 2 should be practiced in every local church. It helps bridge the generation gap. It promotes true fellowship among believers and deals with life inside *and* outside the church. It helps protect the church from any false doctrine and promotes a biblically sound and healthy church. It helps uphold the integrity of the Scriptures through practical living. When put into practice it leads to godly and holy living. It will minister to our families. And it will hold us all accountable. Just “As iron sharpens iron,” we will be sharpening the countenances of our friends.

Now tell me, is there anything wrong when a young Christian woman follows the example of an older and godly Christian woman? Is there anything wrong when a young Christian man follows the example of an older and godly Christian man? Then it’s just as Paul wrote to the Corinthians: “Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ” (1 Cor. 11:1).

## CONCLUSION

As you can probably tell by now, this is only an introduction to next week’s sermon when we will focus more on Timothy in Philippians 2:19-24. I wanted to give a more detailed explanation to this principle of emulating and imitating Christ. My desire is that we all see the importance of “modeling” the Christian life before others. That is crucial for unity, for ministry, and for evangelism. And there truly is joy in *Selfless and Sacrificial Service* as displayed through Christ, Paul, Timothy, Epaphroditus, and hopefully, through each and every one of us here this morning.

Just as a preface to next week’s sermon, consider briefly the people the Lord used to shape and sharpen the life of Timothy. It most definitely started with the godly influence of his mother and grandmother:

When I call to remembrance the genuine [without hypocrisy] faith that is in you, which dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and I am persuaded is in you also (2 Tim. 1:5). [Timothy knew what genuine faith looked like because he saw it in his mother and grandmother].

And that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. (2 Tim. 3:15)

The word Paul uses for “childhood” is *brephos*. Its definition is “an infant, a newborn, even an unborn infant.” It’s never too early to teach our children the things of God. They’re never too young to hear about Jesus.

As Christian parents and grandparents, God wishes to use us to sharpen the countenance of our children and grandchildren, even the children and grandchildren of others. And it's not just done through the words we speak, but more importantly, it's done through the lives we live.

Secondly, God placed the apostle Paul in Timothy's life. It appears that Paul led Timothy to the Lord while at Lystra (Timothy's hometown) during his first missionary journey (Acts 14:8). It was during Paul's second missionary journey, as he and Silas passed through Lystra, that Paul added Timothy to the missionary team. In just a matter of a few years, Paul saw tremendous potential in young Timothy. By the time Paul wrote his letter to the Philippians, Timothy had been under Paul's wing for approximately ten years. Timothy had already become an example of selfless and sacrificial service!

Remember what Paul wrote to Timothy in 2 Timothy 2:2?

And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.

In essence Paul was saying, "Timothy, continue to pass on to others that which I have passed on to you so that they will be able to pass it on to others." That is the ministry of multiplication which is so important in the church. Paul had a Timothy he poured his life into. In-turn, Timothy had other faithful men he would pour his life into.

Now, who has God placed in your life as a Paul? It might be your mom or dad. It could be a friend, a co-worker, or a pastor. God has not placed these people in your path merely by chance. It's important that you see these people and opportunities as divine appointments. Everyone needs a Paul in their life; someone to lead them to Christ and help them grow in Christ.

Who's your Timothy? Who has God placed in your life to lead that person to Christ and then help them grow in their Christian walk? Every believer needs a Timothy. By the way, if you're a dad, be a mentor to your son and lead him in the way of Christ. If you're a mom, be a mentor to your daughter and lead her in the way of Christ. They learn what's important in life by what's important in *your* life. They learn what priorities are by what *your* priorities are.

When a file passes over any rough object, the file actually gives up a part of itself. It's giving itself away. That is sacrifice. *What are you willing to give up of yourself for the sake of ministering to others?* Remember: *ministry requires selflessness and sacrifice.* That's exactly what Paul meant when he wrote to the Corinthians: "And I will very gladly spend and be spent for your souls" (2 Cor. 12:15a). Again he wrote to the Philippians: "Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others" (Phil. 2:4).

When the rough object allows the file to pass over it, it too gives up a part of itself. *What are you willing to give up of yourself to become more like Jesus?*