

Introduction

What do you want to be when you grow up? It's the classic question, isn't it? When I was a young boy, I desperately wanted to mow lawns... actually, part of me still does! Growing up, a career in Jim's Mowing was the most tantalizing and attractive job I could think of. I have clear memories in my mind of watching Jim start up his Honda four stroke, and his whipper snipper, and his leaf blower, cruising in his ute from house to house. As far as I was concerned, Jim was living the dream.

What you want to be when you grow up? We ask kids this to help them dream and plan and aspire. It's an important question... although it can be pretty daunting when you're nearly at the end of school, everyone is asking you what you want to do, and you have no idea!

But somewhere along the way, most of us fall into one job or another. Most of us reach a point where we spend less time asking, 'What do I want to be when I grow up?' But there's another question, a much more difficult question, that doesn't go away after you choose a career. *Who* do I want to be when I grow up? What type of person do I want to be? What type of person should I be?

Some of us are very aware of this question. Maybe it haunts us. We constantly feel insecure in who we are. We're always scanning the people around us and making comparisons. 'I wish I was more like her.' Or 'I really don't want to be like him!' But there are others of us here this morning who've never really thought about *who* we want to be. We're just plodding along, working it out as we go, doing our best.

And yet here's the thing: *every one of us, whether we know it or not, are becoming a certain type of person.* And I'm sorry to break it to you, but none of us are quite as unique and individual as we might like to think. Actually, the person you're becoming is hugely influenced by the people around you. Just like you have an Australian accent and your parent's mannerisms, without even trying... in the same way, every one of us are constantly be shaped by the people around us – our behaviours, our values, our character.

So I want to ask you this morning, *who do you want to be when you grow up?* Who are you becoming? Sure, you're a tradie... but what type of tradie do you want to be? What type of retiree do you want to be? Sure, you're a young person with the world at your fingertips... but what type of person do you want to be? What type of spouse do you want to be? What type of parent do you want to be? Sure, you're a Christian... but what type of Christian do you want to be?

Well, you say to me, I want to be like Jesus. He's my role model, he's my inspiration. And that's great! To be like Christ should be the ultimate goal of every Christian. But sometimes that goal seems incredibly daunting, doesn't it? I mean, a couple of weeks ago, we looked at the example of Christ in verses 5-11... the Son of God who humbled himself by becoming a servant, a humiliated man who died on a cross, and was then exalted to the highest place and given the name above all names. It's an amazing example, for sure! But what would it look like to live like this, day to day? Is it even possible? Last week, Jack looked at verse 12 and reminded us that we need to keep working out our salvation... but some of us can't help but wonder if being a 'mature' Christian is an impossible goal, something that a few super-Christians might be able to achieve, but not me. If

Christianity is a plane, then I'm sitting in economy, right at the back near the toilet door. No business class for me.

Well, that's where the passage we're looking at today comes in. At first glance, it seems a bit weird and out of place, doesn't it? If you're familiar with Paul's letters in the Bible, you'll know that he usually saves his messy logistics and housekeeping matters until the end of the letter. So then why does Paul give us this random information about the travel plans of two random guys, Timothy and Epaphroditus, right in the middle of the letter? Should we just skip this bit and move on to Paul's teaching in chapter 3?

Well, I don't think so. Actually, I think verses 19-30 are awesome, and they've been very carefully placed here by Paul. Think about where we've come so far. In 1:27, Paul urged us to lives worthy of the gospel. Then he told us in 2:3 that will involve humbly valuing others above ourselves and putting their interests first. Then he showed us how Christ's sacrifice on the cross is the ultimate epic example of this. And then last week in verse 12-18, Paul said, this is going to require hard work, so get to it!

And now, in our passage today, we meet two men. Timothy and Epaphroditus. And as Paul talks about them, we discover that they're striking examples of what he's just been talking about. In the midst of a dose of heavy theology, Paul stops and says, Look at these two guys! They're what I'm talking about. You should pay attention to their example, because they're living proof that it's possible to live like this... and they'll show you what it looks like to put my teaching into practice. To use the language of verse 15, here are two stars shining in the dark, and they're worth gazing at.

So that's our goal this morning. As we ask ourselves the question, Who do I want to be when I grow up, what type of Christian do I want to be... we're going to look at the examples of Timothy and Epaphroditus for guidance and inspiration. We're going to look at *selfless Timothy* first, then we're going to look at *suffering Epaphroditus*, and then we're going to wrap up by asking what this means for us. Selfless Timothy, Sacrificial Epaphroditus, and then some application to finish.

Selfless Timothy

In verse 19, Paul says that he's hoping to send Timothy to visit the church in Philippi... soon. How soon? According to v23, as soon as Paul finds out the result of his imprisonment and trial in Rome. So Timothy's visit is partly so that he can let the Philippians know what's happened to Paul, but there's also another reason in verse 19: so that I 'may be cheered when I receive news about you.' So Timothy is going to come to Philippi sometime after they've received this letter, to see how they're going. Paul wants to know what they thought of the letter. He wants to know if they've been doing their homework... and he says he's confident of good news. So Timothy will come to encourage the Christians in Philippi, give them an update about Paul, and then he'll head back and give Paul an update too. It would have been a grueling journey involving weeks of travel over land and sea... it makes you grateful for video calls and instant messaging, doesn't it?

But what's interesting about these verses is that Paul isn't just talking logistics. There's something he wants us to know about Timothy. Look at verse 20: 'I have no one else like him, who will show genuine concern for your welfare. For everyone looks out for their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ.' Can you sense Paul's frustration? 'Everyone looks out for their own interests.' We're not exactly sure who Paul is referring to, but it seems to be a general observation about the Christians around him in the church at Rome. How sad! Paul looks around him and says, most of the Christians here don't really care about others. They're self-absorbed. There's mission work to

be done, but they're too busy. There's needy people in the community who need friendship and support, but no one cares. There's kids and teenagers in the church who need someone to come alongside them, but no one wants to step up... everyone's too self-conscious to put themselves out there. We need elders, deacons, youth leaders, Sunday school teachers, church planters, evangelists... but everyone is too preoccupied with their own business. How sad it would be if Paul's words were true of us today: 'everyone looks out for their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ.'

But in the midst of all this apathy and consumerism and pew-warming, there's a Christian bloke who's different. He stands out... not because he's the center of attention, not because he likes the stage and the lights. Look at what Paul says: 'I have no one else like him, *who will show genuine concern for your welfare.*' What does this remind you of? Remember 2:3 - 'In humility, value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of others.' Remember the example of Christ, who didn't consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage, but made himself nothing. Well, here's Timothy, a living, breathing example of this. Selfless Tim. The world probably wouldn't think much of him. He isn't likely to be an influencer on Instagram or Tik Tok. He isn't likely to be a celebrity pastor of a mega church. I wonder, if Selfless Tim was part of Riverbank, would he'd be your role model? Paul says, pay attention to this guy. He's caring. He's humble. He's always looking out for others, trying to help them, bless them. He is a little glimpse of Christ, in your midst.

Why does Timothy care for the interests of others? Because he cares about the interests of Jesus Christ. Notice the link in v20-21 between caring about Christ and caring about others. If you want to show your love for someone, you need to care about what they care about, don't you? My grandad used to spend many hours in fabric shops, choosing floral prints. Why? Because he loved my grandma, and she loved quilting. Likewise, Christians will care about what Christ cares about, which is what? *People*. The people in this room. The people in this city.

Men, do you ever wonder what it looks like to be a real man? Well, here's a role model. Timothy isn't noteworthy for his biceps or his 4WD... he's noteworthy because he genuinely cares about others. Don't get me wrong, he's not a wimp or a push over. Anyone can be *selfish*, that's easy. But to become *selfless*? That type of character takes years to forge, through sweat and hard work, through humble training under the leadership of other godly men. Look at verse 22: 'You know that Timothy has *proved* himself, because as a son with his father he has *served* with me in the *work* of the gospel.' It's a high calling, to selflessly care for your wife, your kids, your church, your mates. To live like this is to follow in the path of the toughest man who ever lived: Jesus, the servant King.

So that's our first example: selfless Timothy. But then Paul goes on and introduces us to a second person.

Sacrificial Epaphroditus

It's too late for Douglas and Remy, but if anyone else is looking for baby names, you might like to consider Epaphroditus... Pappy for short. But the story of Epaphroditus is even more fascinating than his name. In verses 25-30, we learn that he was a member of the Philippian church who had been sent on a trip to Rome to bring a financial gift to Paul, to help him out while he was locked up. In 4:18, Paul says, 'I am amply supplied, now that I have received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent.'

But... things go horribly wrong on the journey. Epaphroditus gets so sick that he nearly dies. One of his traveling companions probably returned to Philippi with the bad news, while someone else stayed with Epaphroditus and nursed him back to health so that he could struggle his way to Rome. And then we read these remarkable words in verse 26: Epaphroditus 'longs for all of you and is distressed because you heard he was ill.' He's distressed, not because he nearly died, but because he knows his church family in Philippi are worrying about him! And then in verse 28 we learn that *Paul* is anxious too, because Epaphroditus and the Philippians are apart, and so he's decided to send Epaphroditus home, bringing this letter with him. The whole situation is just oozing with affection and friendship, isn't it?

This is actually quite an emotional passage for me because last year the church plant that I was part of had to close... and these are the verses that my dad preached on just after we'd made that incredibly difficult decision to close the church. I remember listening to that sermon with tears streaming down my face. Here we were, a team of people who were exhausted after 7 years of hard work. We invested everything we had into that church. We sacrificed, we served... and now, we couldn't help but feel like we'd failed. It's not that we did anything wrong, but the church simply didn't grow as much as it needed to. We couldn't afford to pay our pastor anymore. Deep inside, it hurt. Humanly speaking, it felt a lot like failure. Was it worth it? What was God doing?

Some people might be tempted to think that Epaphroditus was a bit of a failure too. I mean, he went on this journey, got sick, then got *home*-sick, and then came home early instead of staying on to help Paul. It hardly seems like a story worth recording in the Bible. And yet, look at what Paul says about Epaphroditus in verse 25. Look at how he honours him! Epaphroditus, 'my brother, co-worker, and fellow soldier, who is also your messenger and minister to my need.' This is the great apostle Paul, and he's heaping praise on a random guy who we would otherwise never have heard about. He wasn't a great missionary or preacher, he didn't write any books or letters. He was just a layman who delivered a bag of gold to Paul, and nearly died in the process... and Paul goes out of his way to honour him, to lift him up to his own level as a brother, co-worker and *fellow* soldier. And then in verse 29 he says to the Philippians, 'So then, welcome him in the Lord with great joy, and honour people like him, because he almost died for the work of Christ.'

Who do you want to be when you grow up? What would a successful life look like? Paul says, take a look at Epaphroditus. Here's someone worthy of honour. Look at his costly sacrifice. He risked it all for Jesus. He went all in. Sure, things didn't pan out as expected. Sure, it involved sacrifice and suffering... he nearly died for goodness sake! But that's what it looks like to follow Jesus, the one who was obedient to death, even death on a cross. You lay it all on the line. You give up the right to curate your life and control your outcomes. But who else would you rather give your life to, than the Lord of Lords?

Look at how the sovereign lordship of Jesus dominates this passage. V19: 'I hope *in the Lord Jesus* to send Timothy to you soon.' V24: 'I am confident *in the Lord* that I myself will come soon.' V27: 'He almost died, but *God* had mercy on him.' V29: 'Welcome him *in the Lord* with great joy.' V30: 'He almost died *for the work of Christ*.' Who do you want to be when you grow up? I want to be someone who isn't just a Christian in name, but who really lives as if Christ is my Lord. The things I do, the plans I make, the struggles I face... all of it lived in complete dependence on the Lord, resting in him, trusting in him, safe in him.

Conclusion

It's a high calling. It's a bit daunting. But aren't Timothy and Epaphroditus and Paul inspiring examples of this? You know, sometimes we can feel like Paul is some sort of super-saint, somehow distant from our own mundane lives full of sin and struggle. We read the grand theology in Paul's letters and it can feel so theoretical, and out of reach. And then, praise God, we stumble across a passage like this! And we meet a version of Paul who was surrounded by friends who he loved, who brought him joy, who he relied on, whose untimely death would have caused him great sorrow. Look at this vulnerable man, relying on the support of others, missing his fellow believers, getting anxious, longing for news, longing to visit. In this passage, Paul invites us into the mess of his daily life, filled with sorrow and stress and sickness. Paul isn't wearing a white coat and living out his faith in a laboratory. He's a soldier, struggling his way through the chaos of the battlefield.

And I think there are some of us here today who really need to hear this. Some of us need to realize that theology isn't just meant to be understood, it's meant to be lived - lived out in the all the mess of real life, where people struggle with anxiety, where people get sick and die, where plans fall through and churches struggle with apathetic people. Some of us need to realize that these people in the Bible weren't superheroes or business-class Christians. If you think you can't be a mature, godly, on-fire Christian who goes all in for Jesus, because you're just a bit average... then you've been hanging out with the wrong role models. Look at Epaphroditus. He's not a pastor or a theologian. He's a Christian Uber driver delivering money to Paul. He's a practical, hands-on, down to earth guy who went all in for Jesus. And Paul says, here's someone worth honouring.

Friends, Christianity is a real faith, for real people, that is lived out in the real world. How do we learn to live like this? How do we get better at this? *By looking around you at the people in this church and finding honourable people who you can watch, and imitate, and learn from.* Who's influencing you? Who's inspiring you? Be careful about which role models you choose. You probably won't find them out there on social media. They might be so humble that you've barely noticed them till now. People in our midst like selfless Tim, people like sacrificial Pappy. Everyone else looks out for their own interests, but these people are genuinely concerned for others. These people are quietly living for Jesus and putting him first no matter what the cost... on the worksite, in the office, with their kids, with their neighbours, in their growth group, overseas on the mission field. And Don Carson says this: 'Watch them. Watch how they act, how they talk, how they react. Talk with them; learn their heartbeat. Imitate them.'

Who do you want to be when you grow up? If you want to be like Christ, then turn your attention to the Christ-like servants among us. Honour them. Imitate them. Be inspired by them. And then go and be like them so that you can be an example to others. An example to the kids in our church - to Douglas, to Remy, to Josephine. So that your life can be like a window, through which people see something of Jesus - loving, selfless, sacrificial.