

Ideal Role Models Philippians 2:19-30 and 3:17-21

Imitation is unavoidable. We cannot help but imitate other people, whether consciously or unconsciously. All we can choose is who to follow. Discover five characteristics of ideal role models so you can follow the right people and become the right role model for others to follow.

Turn to Philippians 3

We have a pastor, Buck Anderson, who loves sports analogies

- Can somehow connect everything we do at this church with baseball or football
- That's a problem for me because I don't really like sports or know much about them – would get lost in his metaphors
- So I was really surprised when a few years ago in a staff meeting I said, "That is the best play we can run" – what? That's a sports metaphor. Why is that coming out of my mouth?! That's not how I talk. That's how Buck talks!

I don't really want to be a follower of other people – want to be authentic and unique...

But in that moment, my brain betrayed me

- I subconsciously picked up one of his more frequent football metaphors and made it my own
- I wasn't even aware of his influence over me till I heard those words come out of my mouth

Turns out my imitation of Buck is not really my fault – humans are born imitators

- 1977 study out of Oxford - found that infants between 12 and 21 days old were already capable of imitating the facial expressions of adults
- We are born with an innate capacity to recognize and repeat the behavior of others
- That's actually how babies develop the ability to communicate
- Another pioneering study by a French and American team of neuroscientists, "We don't learn to imitate. It is part of our biological nature and we are born to imitate"
- In other words: humans are not the totally independent, free-thinkers we like to imagine ourselves as
- We are all followers – we can't help it – it's true of all humans

So as we study a passage in Philippians on the subject of imitation...

- The question for us is NOT "Will you imitate other people?" – that's a "YES!"
- The question is, "Who will you choose to imitate?"

We're at church so we know the right answer is JESUS!

- He is, indeed, the best example for us to follow – one and only perfect person
- But He's not with us in the flesh today – can't go to lunch with Him, do life with Him in the flesh
- You can't see how He interacts with a boss at work or raises His kids or balances a budget

We need people in our lives like Jesus who we can follow and learn from

Here's how Paul puts it in 3:17-18 [read]

Paul knows the Philippians are going to follow someone – they can't help that – we all do
He wants to make sure they're imitating the right kind of people...

- "join in following my example" = "join with one another in imitating me"

- Paul often directed younger believers to follow his example
- Might seem a bit arrogant until you remember, Paul actually saw and heard from Jesus Himself. He was one of the original apostles. He was uniquely qualified to be followed!
- But he doesn't want us to just follow him... he says "pay careful attention to" those who live according to the principles and practices I have taught you
 - Paul wants us to look up to other believers who are practicing the pattern of life laid down in Scripture
- He wants us to follow those kind of role models instead of the people found in v18...
 - v18 is a warning – there are really bad role models out there; who are actually enemies of the gospel; who will lead you astray

So, who are you following? Who is it that you look up to and want to be like?

Paul will teach us how to CHOOSE the right people to look up to

And at the same time, he'll teach us how to BECOME the right people for others to look up to

- This passage goes both ways – shows you who to follow and how to become someone others should follow

Jump back to chapter 2 – Paul will introduce us to 2 men who are great role models to follow

- He will point out character traits in each man that we should imitate
- These are the traits you should look for in the people you follow and look up to
- And these are the traits you need to grow in to become someone others should follow

He starts with Timothy – read 2:19-24

- Paul planned to send Tim as soon as he can spare him – sometime after this letter was sent
- Purpose: to encourage the Philippians and check on them for Paul so Paul wouldn't be anxious
- Paul points out two traits that should be present in the people we look up to...

[1] Selfless

- The natural human state is described perfectly in v21 – "all seek after their own interests"
- That's what all humans do by nature – it's programmed into us from birth
 - You don't have to teach a child to seek his or her own interests
 - We're born preoccupied with self
 - You have to teach a child to look beyond self-interest to see needs of others
- Selflessness is NOT NATURAL – it's HARD WORK
 - even for us who've trusted in Jesus and been filled with His Spirit – it still takes great effort to resist selfishness
- What we need are role models who, like Timothy, put others ahead of themselves
 - Timothy put "your welfare" above his own – the good of other believers
 - He put the "interests of Christ... and furtherance of the gospel" above his own interests – meaning he prioritized the task of helping people find and follow Jesus
- Look up to people who care deeply about Jesus and the good of other people
 - Who put Jesus and others ahead of themselves
- So let's get practical: how do you identify a person to follow who is selfless? What are the outward signs of a selfless person?
 - **Quick to listen, slow to speak** – they tend to talk less about themselves and instead, listen more to the person with whom they are speaking. They genuinely want to know about the other person – their story, their interests
 - This is the kind of person who is FASCINATED not fascinating...
 - Like my friend Chris – when he meets someone new he spends his time asking questions and then listening to their story, their opinions, their interests.

And he's totally authentic – he really wants to get to know them – he's such a great listener. That's what selflessness looks like.

- **Quick to share** – they have open hands on their possessions and money. They're quick to share what they have with others, and they share without strings attached – no demand for payback. Look for people who are so generous that the world would call them a bit crazy!
- **Quick to invite** – look for someone who tends to reach outside of their own circle of friends to invite new people into their lives
 - Example: my friend from college – not uncommon that if we had a party or dinner or hang out, he would show up with some guy we'd never met and who he had just met... at the store or in class or doing laundry, and if the guy didn't have many friends, then he would invite him to hang out with us. He was always gathering people on the outside who were alone and bringing them into our community. That's selflessness.

[2] Proven – re-read 2:22

- Paul points out Timothy's "proven worth"
 - He had proven to be a good role model not just for a few months, but for years
 - He had been tested by the trials of life and had succeeded in following Jesus
- Specifically, Paul points out Timothy's proven...
 - submission to authority
 - he submitted to Paul "like a child to his father"
 - he did not rebel against the authority God had placed in his life; he submitted
 - we all have authorities we follow – even me as your pastor – I submit to Brian as my boss, and both Brian and I submit to the elders
 - there have been and will be times when I disagree with a decision made above me... but my hope is to be an example, like Timothy, of humble submission to authority – that is a measure of our maturity as followers of Christ
 - service to the gospel
 - he worked really hard for years and years to advance the gospel and build the church – he gave his time and sweat to build Jesus' kingdom rather than his own
- **Again, let's get specific: look up to those with decades of proven faithfulness to Christ**
- **Beware of the cult of the young and new within Christianity**
 - We know that's how the world works – our society cares a lot about what Post Malone or Arianna Grande or Taylor Swift think. Nothing against any of those celebrities – but it is concerning when the most listened to voices in your culture are under 30 years old! They have not lived long enough to prove their character and wisdom yet.
 - We in the church should know better... but we are often just as guilty of falling for the cult of the young and new – of following writers, preachers, and artists who haven't yet lived long enough to prove themselves.
 - **I am highly suspicious of any Christian advice book written by anyone younger than 40!**
 - I remember getting a book on marriage written by a guy in his 20's who wasn't married yet. I did not read it. I don't care how good of a writer he is... he isn't proven yet. I'm not going to give him access to speak into my soul when he is not yet proven by life.
 - **I'm equally suspicious of young megachurch preachers – guys in their 20's with incredible preaching skills who are handed an entire church to run.**
 - That's dangerous!
 - Preaching skill is no substitute for age and life experience.
 - I was handed SW when I was 32 – that's young! I am so glad I was still under the authority of Brian and the elders and surrounded by other pastors who were my peers. I was not ready to run this ship. I was certainly not ready to write a book for the whole Christian world to read. I'm still not ready for that... and I'm 42 now!

- Be careful of following young people who are not yet proven
- **Look for a mentor or role-model who has faithfully followed Jesus for a long time**
- **For me, I tend to listen the most to authors who are dead!**
 - CS Lewis, AW Tozer, Hudson Taylor, Prof Hendricks, Eugene Peterson who died this week – they get my attention because they all followed Jesus throughout the long years of their lives – they were proven faithful
 - Now I do also follow people who are still living, but I look for a long track record of faithfulness
 - I look up to our older elders, our older pastors – they’ve proven their character
 - Authors who’ve been faithful for a long time like Beth Moore or Tim Keller

Now let’s look at a trait to imitate from our 2nd role model, a man named Epaphroditus

Read 2:25-30

- Epaphroditus was the guy who actually brought this letter to the Philippians – there was no email or even postal service
- He was actually a member of the church in Philippi
 - he had proven faithful over the years at that church
- When Paul landed in prison, the Philippians sent him to care for Paul’s physical needs
 - a prisoner under house arrest, like Paul, was responsible for his own housing, food, and clothing
 - but a catch: he couldn’t work because he was under house arrest! Couldn’t earn income
 - Paul was only able to eat because Epaphroditus came to meet his physical needs
 - Somehow got money for food & supplies – shopped for Paul – took care of him
 - By taking care of Paul’s physical needs in person, Epaphroditus was fulfilling the Philippians’ service to Paul. That’s the idea of the confusing phrase at the end of v30. Paul wasn’t rebuking the Philippians. He’s simply saying, “What you guys can’t do because you’re a 1000 miles away, Epaphroditus has done for me on your behalf.”
- Epaphroditus had proven incredibly helpful to Paul on a very personal level
- So Paul points out a third trait we should look for in the people we follow... (reread v30)

[3] Willing to Suffer for Others

- We don’t know exactly how Epaphroditus got sick, we just know that the reason he got sick was because of his sacrificial service to Jesus and to Paul
- Epaphroditus was willing to suffer for the sake of others
 - That’s what Jesus did on the cross for us
 - That’s what Jesus told us to be ready to embrace in life – He said, “Take up your cross and follow Me.” That’s exactly what Epaphroditus did – not with a literal cross, but with a life-threatening illness that came as a result of serving Paul
- We should look up to people who willingly suffer for the sake of Jesus and others
- **Examples:**
 - A friend who anonymously mowed my lawn in the summer heat while I was on vacation so I wouldn’t have to rush to do it when I got home. I still don’t know for sure who did it. I think I know, but whoever it was never told me, so I can’t know for sure. By I can look up to his example. He suffered in the hot sun for 2 hours to serve me. That’s an example I want to follow.
 - I think of a girl whose name I won’t mention who served our church with Launch Global and then went overseas to a closed Muslim country to share the gospel. She sacrificed the comforts of home and the fellowship of her friends... and she has taken a great risk – she’s gone to a place where Christians suffer imprisonment and even death – she’s willing to suffer to that people can hear about Jesus. She’s worthy of us following her example.
 - I think of our elders who are not paid at all for what they do and yet who willingly step in to the hardest interpersonal situations in our church to bring guidance and comfort. They suffer with those who are suffering – that’s what it means to be an elder – you choose to suffer with those who suffer – there is no glamour in being an elder. They are worthy of following.

Now we go back to the passage we started with this morning... **Read 3:17-21**

First, Paul describes the kind of people NOT to follow

- opposed to the gospel – not just uninterested in the gospel message, but strongly opposed to any talk about Jesus. They ridicule the gospel message.
- destined for destruction – if they continue on this path they will be condemned by God
- whose god is their appetite – they make the appetites of their bodies ultimate in life – appetite for food, sex, comfort, pleasure rule every decision they make – satisfying those desires is what they live for
- glory in their shame – it's not only that they do or say things that are immoral or selfish, it's that they celebrate it when they do it! They don't feel guilt or regret over it. They feel cool because of their sinful behavior.
- set their minds on earthly things – they live for what this world and this life can offer – they give no thought or care to the next life

Now you may be thinking, "I would NEVER follow that kind of person!"

- I would never choose as a role model someone who was an enemy of the gospel, who worshipped sin and who gloried in shame
- My wife gave me permission to share one of her more embarrassing moments in life. She was running on a treadmill at a gym in Dallas, on the front row of three rows of treadmills. And as she's running she's watching a show on a TV mounted on the wall in front of her. Except it wasn't exactly in front of her – it was a few feet to the side. So she just turned her head a bit and watched as she ran at a pretty good clip. And everything was going well till out of the blue one foot stepped on the stationary side rail of the treadmill, and she catapulted right off the machine in full view of the whole gym.
- So what happened? She wasn't looking straight ahead. Her eyes were to the side and her body eventually followed. You will eventually drift towards whatever you focus your attention on.

The primary danger of v18 is not that we would intentionally follow someone as horrible as this... it's that we would watch or listen to them so often, for so long, that we would gradually drift to become more like them.

- I'm talking particularly about the shows we watch, music we listen to, and things we read.
- Even though we may not want to follow the ungodly examples of most celebrities, if you fill your mind with their lives, their music, their behavior you will begin to think and act like them. You can't help it. We are born imitators. So be careful about what you watch, listen to, and read; and how much you watch, listen to, and read.

Paul wants us to intentionally follow the opposite kind of role models... and he points out 2 traits in particular to look for in a person you follow...

First, v17, they "walk according to the pattern you have in us" – that means they...

4] Pursuing holiness

- They know and follow what Jesus and his apostles commanded and modeled in scripture – they live according to that pattern or example we have in Jesus.
- Exact opposite of the people to avoid who worship their appetites and glory in their shame – they live for sin. Good role models live for holiness.
- That doesn't mean they're perfect – there's no one living who's perfect. But they take obedience seriously. They work hard to obey Jesus in every area of life. They fight temptation. They practice accountability and confession. They strive for greater righteousness. They don't surrender to sin.
- That's the kind of person to follow.

5] Longing for heaven – v20

- Again, exact opposite of the people to avoid who set their minds on earthly things
- Ideal role models set their mind on heavenly things

- What that means: they are looking for their best life in the next life, not this life
 - o They are not living for the next bonus, the next vacation, the next house, the next car
 - o Not there's anything wrong with a bonus, vacation, house, or car
 - o But those earthly things aren't what they're living for – not the center of their hope – not their great ambition in life
- What they are most looking forward to is seeing Jesus in the flesh – they long to be with Him in heaven – that's where their hope is
- I think of my DTS profs – men and women with PhD's who could have earned much bigger salaries if they had employed their intellects elsewhere – but instead lived in small homes and drove old cars so they could teach at a seminary investing in future leaders for God's church
- That's the kind of person you should follow

Who are you following? Who do you look up to? If you are wise, you look up to role models who are:

- Selfless
- Proven
- Willing to suffer for others
- Pursuing holiness
- Longing for heaven