

Satisfied With Second Place

Humility, Part 10

Philippians 2:19-22

Every student at one point or another learns something about the life and inventions of Isaac Newton.

Newton was a 17th century inventor, philosopher, physicist, mathematician, and so much more . . . and he would play a leading role as one of the world's most influential scientists of all time.

Sir Isaac Newton is typically caricatured – even to this day – as a man sitting under an apple tree when an apple falls, hits him on the head – leading him to question why things fall down, instead of float away into outer space.

That's a legend . . . in reality Isaac Newton would make discoveries in optics, astronomy, geometry, natural philosophy, and on and on. His inventions and formulations and deductions were literally life-changing discoveries.

Far less people have ever heard of Edmund Halley, a friend and peer scientist with Isaac Newton. But the truth is, if it weren't for Edmund Halley, the world might never have learned so much from Isaac Newton.

You see it was Edmund Halley:

- who challenged Newton to think through some of his original notions;
- it was Halley who corrected Newton's mathematical errors;
- it was Halley who coaxed his timid friend into publishing his monumental work on Natural Philosophy;
- it was Halley who edited and supervised the publication of that same work;
- in fact, it was Edmund Halley who financed the first edition of that work with

his own money, so that it would see the light of day.

The only reason any of us even know about Edmund Halley is because of the comet, he discovered and charted, which would be named after him.

Halley's Comet is seen briefly once every 76 years and then disappears once again into the vast galaxy, much like the life of Halley himself.

His comet was last seen orbiting the Sun, right on schedule, on February 9, 1986.

Historians call the relationship of Edmund Halley to Isaac Newton one of the most selfless examples in the world of science. Newton would receive prominence and Halley would receive little credit or attention from his peers.

In fact, one biographical statement about Halley quoted him as saying that he didn't care who received the credit, his mission in life was to simply advance the cause of science.¹

The Apostle Paul is about to introduce us to his protégé . . . a younger man who will never quite make it out of Paul's shadow; but he wouldn't have cared.

In fact, Paul is going to use young Timothy as an example of humility . . . a man who really didn't care who received the credit – his mission in life was to simply advance the gospel.

If you turn back to Paul's personal letter to the believers living in Philippi, we begin a new paragraph.

By the way, this is a great opportunity for me to commend you – as diligent, patient students of the word. Most pastors after 10 weeks will start a new series, we start a new paragraph. And every so often, we start a new chapter.

I'll never forget when my oldest daughter was around 6 or 7 she asked me on the way to church once, "Daddy, what verse are you going to preach this year?"

Well, here we are at a new paragraph. And Paul will introduce Timothy to us as he continues along this theme of humility.

And the first of several characteristics Paul highlights about Timothy is:

1. His devotion

Let's pick it up at *Philippians chapter 2 and verse 19. But I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you shortly, so that I also may be encouraged when I learn of your condition.*

In other words, Paul is going to send Timothy from Rome to the church of Philippi to find out how they're doing.

And why send Timothy?

Notice verse 20. For I have no one else of kindred spirit

In other words, there's no one that I can trust for this mission like I can trust the heart of Timothy.

You may know that Paul had spent year's discipling Timothy.

And the end result of discipleship is reproduction – Jesus said *that after being trained, the student will become like his teacher (Matthew 10:25)*. Over the course of time, one author wrote, Timothy came to think like Paul, relate to believers and unbelievers like Paul, evaluate ideas and situations and trends and concerns like Paul, trust the Lord for direction like Paul and even pray like Paul.ⁱⁱ

Now the word Paul uses here for *kindred spirit* is *isopsuxos* (ἰσοψυχός) – a compound word from *isos* – equal; and *psuche* – for soul. Woodenly translated it means equal-souled – or having the same mind.ⁱⁱⁱ

It's such a rare use of the term that this is the only time it appears in the New Testament in this form.

Paul is saying here that he and Timothy are effectively equals in their passion for the church.

And listen, it's easy to miss here the volume that this statement writes about the humility of Paul.

Paul was a converted Jew – a Hebrew of Hebrews; a Pharisee of Pharisees; trained personally in rabbinical law by the famous Gamaliel the elder; Paul would have prayed like faithful Jewish rabbis

as he once did, I thank God that He did not make me a Gentile.

Even more disdained than Gentiles were half-breeds; babies born to either Jewish men or women who effectively abandoned their heritage and married a pagan and then had a child – now half-Jew, half-Gentile.

That was Timothy.

He would have been the last person on the earth that Paul would have ever been interested in leading, discipling and certainly loving as if he were his own son.

So this statement here tells us that something revolutionary has happened in both Paul and Timothy's lives.

We know from scripture that Paul met Timothy on his first missionary journey (Acts 14). As Paul preached in Timothy's home town, Timothy was converted to faith in Christ. His mother, Eunice was a Jewess who had married a Greek unbeliever (Acts 16).

She would evidently come to regret the lack of a godly father for Timothy – soon after his birth; in fact, she takes upon herself the role of the typical Jewish male-father figure as so many godly women have done since her generation – and we're told in 2 Timothy 3 that she and her converted mother, Timothy's grandmother Lois, trained Timothy in the scriptures from a very early age.

The language implies that they taught him to read by teaching him the scriptures. Evidently Timothy's father allowed this instruction. But he put his foot down and refused to allow Timothy to become circumcised – he wasn't going to have any part in that.

He must have said something like, "Eunice, you can teach the boy your Old Testament religious stuff, but he's not going to become a Jew – he's going to stay Greek."

How many husbands since that time have effectively communicated to their godly wives, "Listen, you can take the kids to Sunday School or church – but don't get fanatical about it – let's leave that stuff for Sunday morning and then get on with life."

Listen, I'd love to know more about Timothy's early home life, but the heart of his mother and grandmother must have thrilled to see Timothy listen to Paul preach and then believe in Christ, as they had done earlier (2 Timothy 1:5).

Now, the second time Paul travels back through Timothy's home town he's struck by the maturity of this young man who has already surfaced in the church as an emerging leader.

And then Paul does the unthinkable; I mean the church is still wrestling with Jewish/Gentile issues and unity – and Paul invites Timothy to join him on his missionary journeys.

Paul spiritually adopts him and for years they will impact the church together.

Paul refers to Timothy as:

My child in the Lord (1 Corinthians 4:17);

My true child in the faith (1 Timothy 1:2);

My fellow worker (Romans 16:21);

My brother (2 Corinthians 1:1);

In fact, Timothy will become Paul's trouble shooter – and problem solver; Paul will send him to Corinth and Macedonia for difficult assignments; Paul will send him to Thessalonica as well and then to Ephesus (1 Timothy 1) and here we read that Paul is about to send him to Philippi from Rome.^{iv}

Timothy is mentioned 24 times in Paul's letters.^v

He's eventually going to be one of the few who stick by Paul while Paul serves time in a Roman prison and ultimately dies at the order of Nero. And Timothy will go on to become the Pastor/teacher in the great church at Ephesus.

Listen if you had lived among the first century believers and you were at one of their potlucks . . . and you sat around and talked to others at your table about the heart of the Paul and the passion of Paul and the zeal of Paul – you would have found yourself talking about the most unlikely development – “You know that young Timothy – yea, that kid from that mixed marriage – half Jew half Gentile, can you believe what he's grown up to become . . . I mean only Paul saw something in that boy . . . none of us did.

None of us did.

The difference in Timothy's life, by the providence of God was that Paul, an older man in the Lord will invest in a spiritually fatherless young man.

I can't tell you how many men in this church have found the same relationship and are being disciplined and taught and led by older men.

One author wrote these transparent words, “When I was in elementary school, my dad's commute was two hours each way. In those formative years, every Monday through Friday I never ate a meal with my dad. That left a gaping

hole in my soul, and I sometimes wondered, “How can I be a father when I hardly know what it means to be fathered myself?”

As I neared the end of my 30's I started struggling with life – the meaning of life; even though I trusted in Christ and followed Him, I struggled with the meaning of life. My wife finally said, “Look, I obviously can't help you . . . why don't you go and talk to Doug?” That began an 11 year discipleship in which Doug, an older Christian became my mentor – we met at least once every month. He listened, asked questions, cared and prayed. Twice in those 11 years he firmly warned me that I was making a wrong decision – looking back on those “almost decisions” he was right. Mostly, he just showed up . . . steadily, strengthened me to now serve as a father to others along the way.^{vi}

Paul fathered Timothy along . . . and now here Paul pays Timothy an incredible compliment that he knew would not only reassure the church in Philippi, but encourage Timothy – he writes, Timothy and I share the same passion . . . the same mind . . . the same devotion.

Paul goes on to give us another observation into the life of this young model of humility;

Not only seen in his devotion, but secondly in:

2. His distress

Notice a little more carefully at verse 20. For I have no one else of kindred spirit who will genuinely be concerned for your welfare.

This adverb – *genuinely* – implies that the Philippians might not believe Timothy cares about them.

So Paul stresses the point – Timothy is *genuinely concerned* – not hypocritically – not Sunday morning concerned – he's 7 days a week truly concerned.

And the verb *to be concerned* is really interesting because later in this letter Paul is going to tell us not to do it.

You can translate it “*to be anxious*” (merimnao; μεριμναω) – to be concerned; to give one's thoughts to a matter.^{vii}

In chapter 4 and verse 6 Paul will say, ‘Do not be anxious about anything.’

But here he's using the same word to tell us what Timothy is feeling.

Now, obviously there's a difference between unhealthy, unspiritual, untrusting anxiety and godly concern. The unspiritual, untrusting anxiety is actually a result of pride – when we've come to the notion somehow that it's all up to us – and if we don't worry about it, even God can't fix it.

On the other hand, as one New Testament scholar pointed out, there is a sense of personal, deep longing and concern. So, let's not too quickly sanitize this Greek verb so that we make it too mild an emotion to end up looking like some kind of passing concern.

In fact, Paul uses the same verb when he writes to the Corinthians, "***There is the daily pressure on me of concern*** – there's the word – ***there is the daily pressure on me of concern for all the churches. Who is being led into the trap of sin without my intense concern?***" (2 Corinthians 11:28-29)

Listen, Paul is saying that there is actually a good kind of worry – a good kind of pressure – a good kind of deep intense concern – and it isn't over just your life and your world and your family and your job and your stuff which everyone naturally worries about to some extent; here Paul is referring to anxious thoughts and concern over the spiritual protection and maturity and gospel belief and outreach of the gospel of the church.

And he's deeply concerned over those being led astray – or tempted to fall into the trap of sin. He calls it ***the daily pressure of concern***.

Same word used here to the Philippians of Timothy's genuine concern.

Listen; what Paul and Timothy are displaying is the heart of a genuine shepherd. A true shepherd agonizes over the health of the assembly; he suffers intensely from the pressure to see the young lambs protected and maturing sheep fed and serving and the older sheep producing the ripe fruit of the Spirit of God.

The traps are everywhere . . .

I'm going to be meeting tonight with 20 of your shepherds – your elders. I can tell you that there is nothing like this unique pressure that we share; this anxious concern for your well-being; this deep concern over sheep that are drifting into the trap of sin; we will pray even tonight for you – and this body of Christ.

If you're a parent who follows Christ, you understand this deep pressure for the spiritual well-being of your children. There's nothing like the agonizing concern over a young person straying into

sin; there's no sweeter sleep than knowing your children are walking with God.

This is the true heart of a godly parent – a godly teacher – a discipler – an older mentor – a pastor – an elder – a deacon – a volunteer.

This is Timothy's devotion . . . this is Timothy's distress.

Thirdly, Paul points out Timothy's;

3. His distinctiveness

Paul drives home this rather tragic point – ***I have no one else of kindred spirit who will genuinely be concerned for your welfare*** – now notice ***verse 21, for they all seek after their own interests, not the interests of Christ Jesus***

Now when Paul says they ***all*** – he can't mean everyone in the church simply because we happen to know that Luke is there, along with John Mark at one point, and Aristarchus (Colossians 4:10 & Philemon 24)

Paul refers to the all here as those who are ***seeking after their own interests***. And that takes us back to ***verse 4 in chapter 2*** where Paul describes the opposite of humility. And then back even further into ***chapter 1***, where Paul refers to other pastors and church leaders in Rome who are ***preaching Christ out of envy and strife (verse 15)***.

In other words, they really don't care about the flock; they care about their own following. They are preaching the gospel, but they are envious of Paul so they stirred up strife against Paul and they preached from selfish ambition and, Paul writes openly and transparently in ***chapter 1 and verse 17, they brought me distress***.

They really added to my suffering.

So, Paul seems to be comparing Timothy as a pastor/shepherd to all the other pastors and church leaders in Rome – which is a staggering implication.

Timothy is genuinely concerned for the flock – and all the others are concerned about creating their own following.

So this is what sets Timothy apart.

To Timothy, the ministry isn't all about him.

Paul is implying then that when Timothy comes to visit you in Philippi, you're not going to hear Timothy talk about Timothy.

In an article on the rapid development and discoveries in the neuroscience world, one scientist wrote, "If you're like most people, you have a hands down favorite topic for most of your conversations –

yourself. On average, people spend 60% of their conversations talking about themselves – and this figure jumps to 80% when you include social media platforms like Twitter or Facebook.

But now it gets interesting. Researchers from Harvard brought in 195 participants to simply talk about a variety of subjects while researchers scanned their brain activity. The results of the study showed that talking about themselves lit up the parts of the our brain associated with motivation and reward – the same parts of the brain associated with pleasure like food – and even drugs like cocaine. The article summarized it this way: “Activation of this system in the brain when discussing oneself suggests that self-disclosure may be inherently pleasurable – and that people may be motivated to talk about themselves more than other topics no matter how interesting or important those non-self-related topics may be. This author added, “in other words, we love talking about ourselves because it feels good – it is actually producing a neurological buzz that feels good.”^{viii}

Can you imagine the implication of this – that it can be shown on a digital screen that culture is only growing more and more neurotic with people actually addicted to the sensory pleasure they feel whenever they talk about themselves and they’ve got to keep the buzz alive.

They have actually only discovered in brain activity what we already know by means of revelation; talking about ourselves is a matter of pride and that will always feel better than being ignored – which demands humility.

Listen, the Spirit of God has to do radical brain surgery . . . our minds need to be transformed and renewed (**Romans 12:1-2**).

Left alone to our own devices we will be consumed with pride and selfish ambition – even in the church – Paul refers to pastors caught up in it; and the favorite topics for everyone in the church can sound a lot like those outside the church and our conversations will be all about our own selves and our own world and our own family and our own job and our own stuff.

And we’ll find friends who are willing to listen to us talk about ourselves and then we’ll return the favor – and think “we’re really fellowshiping.”

And we’ll wonder why there are far too few Timothy’s with his kind of devotion and his kind of distress and his kind of distinctiveness.

Notice one more this phrase – Paul writes here, *they all seek after their own interests, not those of Christ Jesus*.

By the way, what is Christ Jesus interested in? What are His interests?

- Think of Jesus as a shepherd – wanting to care for others and looking for those who are lost.
- Think of Jesus as a farmer – spreading the seed and raising a spiritual harvest.
- Think of Jesus as a potter – fashioning lives into transformed vessels.^{ix}
- He’s interested in you (1 Peter 5:7);
- He’s interested in the lost (Luke 19:10);
- He’s interested in the glory of His Father (John 8:54);
- He’s interested in the coming kingdom (Matthew 13:45);

What are you interested in? Do you have any genuine interest in the interests of Christ Jesus?

We are to have the attitude that was in Christ Jesus – remember how this chapter opened – it is the humble attitude of Jesus that makes Him interested in us – in the lost – in the glory of His Father – in the coming Kingdom, which He will actually share with us.

Humility is defines our devotion . . . it creates our genuine distress . . . our shapes our distinctiveness;

Paul goes on to refer to another characteristic in Timothy – fourthly;

4. His dependability

Notice in *verse 22. But you know of his proven worth*

You already know of Timothy’s worth. Timothy was more than likely with Paul when this church was established.

You know of his proven worth. Paul uses the word *dokime* (δοκιμη) which refers to going through a test and persevering – in other words, you passed the test.

And by the way, these don’t have to be big tests of endurance. In this context, Timothy has proven himself to care about others. And that can show up in big ways and little.

I was at a wedding yesterday and stood next to a man from our fellowship that I had spotted this past week doing the dishes in the church kitchen after our annual banquet for Shepherds Seminary. It gave me

an opportunity to thank him for tucking himself back in there and washing all the pots and pans.

He said, “Listen, I actually love it – I love doing the dishes.” I said, “Listen, my wife is coming into the lobby in a couple of minutes, would you not say that in front of her . . . I haven’t passed that test yet.”

Dawson Trotman, the founder of the Navigators, now with the Lord, was visiting Taiwan on one of his overseas trips. During the visit he hiked with a Taiwanese pastor back into one of the mountain villages to meet with some of the national Christians. The trails were wet, and their shoes became caked with mud.

Sometime later, one of the believers asked this Taiwanese pastor who had hosted Dawson what he remembered most about the great pioneer and leader of a missionary enterprise. Without blinking an eye, this man replied, “The morning after we arrived at the village, I got out of bed to get dressed and discovered that Dawson had awakened and dressed before I did and when I went to put on my shoes, I realized that he had scraped the mud off and cleaned them up . . . he cleaned the mud off my shoes – and then never said a word about it. And then he smiled and repeated, “Dawson Trotman cleaned my shoes!”^x

Paul is sending Timothy to Philippi . . . to encourage the church and more than likely, clean up some mud and dirt.

It will be a grueling trip that will be exhausting.

His most direct route will be overland from Rome on the Via Appia to Brindizi on southeast coast of Italy – that alone will take him 350 miles. Then he would board a ship a make the voyage across the Adriatic Sea – of some 90 miles – and then from Dyrrachium, he would make a 360 mile trek eastward on the Via Egnatia across Macedonia to Philippi.^{xi}

Timothy would probably celebrate his birthdate somewhere along this round trip journey.

It’s going to take someone tested and proven to persevere! And listen, he’s going to really need to be motivated by the right reason, because the trip will be dangerous and difficult.

And if it isn’t energized by love for Christ and the church, if pride grows along the journey he’ll wonder why nobody ever makes the trip to see him – and why nobody ever does all this for them?

What dependability . . . what humility!

Finally, we see these wonderful qualities of humility expressed in Timothy’s devotion and

distress and distinctiveness and dependability, now fifthly, we see it in his:

5. His deference

Notice verse 22 again, But you know of his proven worth, that he served with me in the furtherance of the gospel like a child serving his father.

Like a child serving his father.

There is a precious element to this terminology. There is a natural delight in a child serving his father – a little child says, “I’m going to help daddy.”

This terminology makes it clear that this wasn’t some cold professional arrangement – this was the intimate loyalty and joy between Timothy and the man who did the unbelievable.^{xii}

The famous Apostle who looked his way and, prompted by the Holy Spirit adopted this kid without a background and not much of a future . . . and became his spiritual mentor and they became like father and son.

And keep in mind how Paul puts this – notice the middle part of *verse 22 – he served with me in the furtherance of the gospel*. Notice Paul doesn’t write, “he served *me*” . . . people would have expected that. Paul says, “he served *with me*”.

That preposition is critical to understand. For those of you who lead – the people you lead are not serving you – they are serving with you. Even though you’re dishing out the directives – they are ultimately serving Christ – not you.^{xiii}

Paul understood this . . . and so did Timothy. But Timothy also understood – as Paul writes here with loving terminology – Paul would always be his spiritual *father* and Timothy would always be his *son*.

I came across a study on the way people think and feel from the athletic world. This fascinating study was carried out by Vicki Medvec, who is currently serving as a professor at the Kellogg School of Management. Several years ago she studied Olympic medalists and discovered through interviews and conversations that bronze medalists were just about as happy as the gold medalists; however, the silver medalists were unhappier at times than both. Here’s why: Silver medalists tended to focus on how close they came to winning the gold medal, so they weren’t satisfied with silver; bronze medalists tended to focus on how close they

came to not winning a medal at all, so they were just happy to be on the stand.^{xiv}

I would imagine that it is indeed very difficult to be happy, standing so close to first place. Second place just might require more humility than third place – or last place.

Timothy would always be second-in-command. But from this rather unique and expanded biography of Timothy, it's pretty clear that second place was just fine with him.^{xv}

By the way, there is no evidence from scripture or from church tradition that Timothy ever married,

had children and a home somewhere where he could rest until the next campaign.^{xvi}

It seems that Timothy will give his life to serve the bride of Christ. He was satisfied with second place.

What devotion . . . what genuine distress . . . what dependability . . . what distinctiveness from others around him who were addicted to the buzz of their own conversations . . . and what deference to his spiritual father . . . but ultimately, what humility in following the purposes of God for his life.

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 5/3/2015 by Stephen Davey.

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i Adapted from the 1995 Grolier Multimedia Encyclopedia

ii John MacArthur, *Philippians* (Moody Publishers, 2001), p. 197

iii Fritz Rienecker & Cleon Rogers, *Linguistic Key to the Greek New Testament* (Regency, 1976), p. 553

iv Adapted from MacArthur, p. 196

v Warren W. Wiersbe, *Philippians: Be Joyful* (Victor Books, 1978), p. 75

vi www.preachingtoday.com/illustrations/2011/august/3080811.html

vii Rienecker/Rogers, p. 553

viii Adapted from Adrian F. Ward, "The Neuroscience of Everybody's Favorite Topic," *Scientific American* (7-16-13)

ix *Life Application Bible Commentary: Philippians, Colossians & Philemon* (Tyndale, 1995), p. 71

x Adapted from Jerry Bridges, "Loving by Serving," *Discipleship Journal* (May/June 1985)

xi Dennis E. Johnson, *Philippians* (P & R Publishing, 2013), p. 175

xii G. Walter Hansen, *The Pillar New Testament Commentary: The Letter to the Philippians* (Apollos, 2009), p. 196

xiii Johnson, p. 179

xiv Adapted from www.preachingtoday.com/illustrations/2008/july/4071408.html

xv J.A. Motyer, *The Message of Philippians* (IVP Academic, 1984), p. 140

xvi Adapted from MacArthur, p. 200