

Wendy's is the third largest hamburger chain in the US, behind McDonalds and Burger King. It was founded when Dave Thomas opened his first restaurant in 1969 and named it after his daughter. And from there it has grown to have more 6500 restaurants across the States and others in 29 countries across the world.

Dave attributed his success to his MBA. But by this he didn't mean his "Master of Business Administration" degree. Instead he meant his "Mop- and-Bucket Attitude."

He believed that no work task was too insignificant for him or any of his employees to tackle. He wanted all of them, including his managers to be willing to jump in and get the job done. To pick up the mop and bucket, and be willing to serve!

But of course Dave didn't invent this idea. As we've seen in Paul's letter to the Philippians, Jesus is the ultimate servant leader. And he calls each of us, whatever our role in life or church, to follow with that same servant attitude.

And in our next section of this letter, Paul provided three amazing examples of people who lived out this attitude of serving others in love.

Philippians 2:19-30: "I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, that I also may be cheered when I receive news about you.²⁰ I have no-one else like him, who takes a genuine interest in your welfare.²¹ For everyone looks out for his own interests, not those of Jesus Christ.²² But 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.²³ I hope, therefore, to send him as soon as I see how things go with me.²⁴ And I am confident in the Lord that I myself will come soon.

But I think it is necessary to send back to you Epaphroditus, my brother, fellow-worker and fellow-soldier, who is also your messenger, whom you sent to take care of my needs.²⁶ For he longs for all of you and is distressed because you heard he was ill.²⁷ Indeed he was ill, and almost died. But God had mercy on him, and not on him only but also on me, to spare me sorrow upon sorrow.²⁸ Therefore I am all the more eager to send him, so that when you see him again you may be glad and I may have less anxiety.²⁹ Welcome him in the Lord with great joy, and honour men like him,³⁰ because he almost died for the work of Christ, risking his life to make up for the help you could not give me."

1. **Caring for Spiritual Welfare**

Timothy was like a son to Paul. And Paul greatly valued him. That's why Paul was so keen to send Timothy to Philippi to see how the church in Philippi was doing. Of course he himself couldn't go as he was under house arrest in Rome.

But what was it that made Paul think so highly of Timothy? Well, it wasn't his charisma or courage or his oratory skills. Timothy seems to have been quite a timid, quiet sort of guy. Instead it was because he: "Takes a genuine interest in your welfare." Philippians 2:20

a) **A Genuine Concern**

Earlier in this letter, we learned that some people in Rome were preaching the gospel, "Out of envy and rivalry" Philippians 1:15. They were pretending to serve the Lord, but in reality they were promoting themselves and trying to cause problems to Paul.

But Timothy didn't serve with these kinds of ulterior motives. Neither was his service forced or artificial.

Instead it came from a genuine concern and care for others. He really loved them. And that's not easy to do.

- We can so easily get caught up in our own lives and forget about our brothers and sisters in Christ.
- We can focus on our own walk with the Lord, and be oblivious to the needs of others and the opportunities we have to serve them.
- Or we can talk lots about lovingly serving others, but do nothing to help them.

But the Bible teaches us that "Love must be sincere." Romans 12:9 We're called to love others in a way that is without hypocrisy, without pretence. Seek their good from a heart that is overwhelmed by God's love and grace in our lives!

In fact, it is this genuine love for other believers that is supposed to be our defining characteristic as Christians. Jesus said, "By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." John 13:35

b) **A Gospel Commitment**

So how did Timothy demonstrate this genuine heart? What evidence did Paul have to back up his confidence in Timothy?

Well this week, many people spent a lot of money to demonstrate their love for their someone special. One survey claimed that Irish people spend more than €200 million each year on Valentine's Day cards, flowers, perfume, chocolates, jewellery or even holidays. Though I have to admit that I don't contribute very much to that spending – sorry Lorna!

But Paul wasn't confident in Timothy's genuine concern for others because he'd bought them gifts. Instead it was because of his gospel commitment. *"As a son with his father he has served with me in the work of the gospel."* Philippians 2:22

The church in Philippi saw this first-hand. Timothy joined Paul's missionary team just before they travelled to Philippi. And so as a young man, he'd served alongside Paul in taking the gospel to this town.

And this was no easy task. It was an act of selfless sacrifice. Paul and Silas had been beaten and imprisoned for doing this. And this threat continued. But Timothy was committed to keep doing this, because he genuinely cared for people.

And if we're genuinely concerned for others, then we'll also be committed to share the gospel with them – point them to Jesus and encourage them in their relationship with him. Evangelism and discipleship should be driven, motivated and enthused with the love of Christ. As Paul said, *"For Christ's love compels us."* 2 Corinthians 5:14

It was love that motivated Jesus to give his life for us on the cross. And that same love should lead us to sacrifice our agendas, plans, even our lives to introduce people to the Saviour and to encourage them to grow in their relationship with him.

c) A Greater Motivation

But Timothy was not just committed to the gospel because of his genuine concern for others. It also flowed from his dedication to Christ!

Paul said about others: *"For everyone looks out for his own interests, not those of Jesus Christ."* Philippians 2:21 But Timothy was different. Instead of being self-centred and self-absorbed, he was focussed on Christ!

Jesus was his priority, his ambition, his Lord! And Timothy expressed this commitment through his genuine concern for the spiritual welfare of others. His love for Christ, motivated him to care for others.

When Jesus restored Peter after denying his Lord 3 times, Peter declared his love for Jesus 3 times. But in response, Jesus called Peter to

- *"Feed my lambs."* John 21:15
- *"Take care of my sheep."* John 21:16
- *"Feed my sheep."* John 21:17.

Love for Jesus and love for his people, his church go hand in hand. They cannot be divorced from each other. They are inseparable.

d) A Rare Quality

That's why it's so sad, shocking even, that this selfless love for others was the very thing that made Timothy stand out as different. Paul said of him: *"I have no-one else like him."* Philippians 2:20

What a sad reflection on the attitude of many Christians in Paul's day. Genuine love for others is such a basic expression of our love for Christ, and yet the more common attitude was that Christians put themselves first, and others second.

I wonder if this situation has changed or would Paul still struggle to find people like Timothy in our church today?

- Are we genuinely concerned for the spiritual welfare of others?
- Do we daily express a real commitment to the gospel?
- Are we motivated by our dedication to Christ?

2. Meeting Practical Needs

Paul was planning to send Timothy in a little while. But another of Paul's friends was heading to the church in Philippi even sooner: *"But I think it is necessary to send back to you Epaphroditus."* Philippians 2:25

a) A Simple Service

Paul also valued this guy. He called him, *"My brother, fellow-worker and fellow-soldier."* Philippians 2:25 These are expressions of respect, love and admiration.

But in many ways Epaphroditus' service was really simple. He was someone, ["Whom you sent to take care of my needs."](#) Philippians 2:25. He'd been sent by the Philippian church to take a financial gift to Paul and to look after his practical, everyday needs.

It is crucial that we see the spiritual needs of those around us – that we recognise the importance of introducing them to Jesus and helping them grow in his grace.

But we also need to get involved in meeting people's everyday problems. To, ["Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality."](#) Romans 12:13

b) A Costly Service

But although this might be a simple service, it is often costly! In Rome, while Epaphroditus was serving Paul, ["He was ill, and almost died."](#) Philippians 2:27

Paul didn't go into the reason for this illness, but he did say ["he almost died for the work of Christ."](#) Philippians 2:30. In some way his illness was connected to his ministry. It reminds us that in this fallen and sin-cursed world, good people suffer.

But it also helps us to really see the heart of this man Epaphroditus. Even in his illness, he was concerned about others - ["He longs for all of you and is distressed because you heard he was ill."](#) Philippians 2:26

Instead of focussing on how ill he was, he was worried about how it impacted others. He was deeply concerned about how his illness had worried his church back home and wanted to encourage them and relieve their concern!

The cost of serving others in our lives might not be so dramatic, but there is always a cost involved. Maybe in terms of our comfort, our space, our finances, but probably one of the biggest is the cost of our time.

Our lives are so busy that it's difficult to take time out to develop deep and lasting relationships, to sit and listen to others, to practically care for their needs. But loving others practically is a crucial part of our Christian lives. John wrote: ["Let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth."](#) 1 John 3:18

This was one of the characteristics of the early church. They didn't just sing, talk or pray about loving each other – they actually lived it out in practical ways. ["There were no needy persons among them. From time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them and brought the money from the sales."](#) Acts 4:34.

God provided for the needs of these early Christians through the sacrificial giving of his people! So could it be that there are Christians in this world who are struggling to have their needs met because we don't love them as we should?

It's a challenging thought, especially because these days we're not just faced with the needs around us. We can also be involved in meeting the needs of people all over this world! It is a great responsibility and a wonderful privilege!

c) A Valued Service

But did you notice what Paul called this ministry of Epaphroditus? He said it was, ["The work of Christ."](#) Philippians 2:30 He recognised that Epaphroditus in his practical ministry, was every bit as much a servant of Christ as he or Timothy were in their spiritual ministry!

And so Paul told the Philippians to, ["Welcome him in the Lord with great joy, and honour men like him."](#) Philippians 2:29.

Epaphroditus wasn't working for their praise. He wasn't doing it for honour. He was serving Christ.

But it was really important for this church that they expressed their appreciation and honour for all that he'd done. It would bless and encourage him. But it would also encourage others to be involved in the unseen, practical and often overlooked ministry of serving others!

In church it is right for us to respect those who serve in the more public roles of leadership, teaching or worship leading. But we mustn't forget those who serve in more private and practical ways. We need to honour those people too.

But even if we don't, the wonderful truth is that we know that Jesus values them, no matter how small or seemingly insignificant their ministry appears. Jesus said: ["If anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because](#)

he is my disciple, I tell you the truth, he will certainly not lose his reward.” Matthew 10:42

This is a huge encouragement to keep serving when at times we feel like giving up. No act of service will ever go unrecognised, unappreciated by Jesus!

So are there practical needs in our church or in our community that we could be involved in meeting? Is there someone God wants us to express his love to in service?

We can do this individually, but we also have a ministry in our church that focusses on this. It's called Helping Hands. It organises distribution of food in association with FoodCloud – collecting spare food from supermarkets and distributing it to people in need.

But at times, it also helps out people inside and outside of our church with practical issues: organising lifts to hospital appointments, dinners for those who're ill, visiting those who're on their own.

Of course, it's limited by the number of people who're involved in it. So if you want to get involved in serving others in this really practical way – then please come and speak to me, Lorna, Tony, or the others involved in it.

It is a simple service, that is costly, but is incredibly valuable.

3. Leading by Example

So Timothy and Epaphroditus are incredible examples of servants of Christ. But perhaps we shouldn't be surprised by that. After all both of these men had been hugely influenced by Paul – who again and again expressed this Christ-like, servant attitude. And in this passage, we can see it again.

a) Consider Others

He was sending Epaphroditus back to the church in Philippi. Not because he didn't need help anymore. Nor because he was fed up with him.

His love for Epaphroditus is shown by his concern when he was ill and his gratitude when he was healed: “But God had mercy on him, and not on him only but also on me, to spare me sorrow upon sorrow.” Philippians 2:27 Clearly Paul would've loved to have kept Epaphroditus with him to enjoy his friendship and fellowship.

But he knew that the church needed to see him too. He sent him back, “So that when you see him again you may be glad and I may have less anxiety.” Philippians 2:28 Paul was putting aside his own desires for the benefit of this church in Philippi!

b) Concerned for Others

He was also planning to send Timothy to see them. This was so, “That I also may be cheered when I receive news about you.” Philippians 2:19

Paul had so many problems of his own that we could've forgiven him if he'd been wrapped up in his own needs and issues. He was imprisoned, watched around the clock by Roman soldiers and under attack from some of the Christians in Rome! And yet his deep concern was to hear about how this little church was getting on!

But that was not all. He was also planning to visit them personally. “I am confident in the Lord that I myself will come soon.” Philippians 2:24

As we've seen, Paul hoped to be released from custody. But if that happened, he wasn't planning a vacation, a retreat or retirement to somewhere safe.

He wanted to go right back to a town where he'd been arrested previously because he was so eager to renew fellowship and encourage his brothers and sisters in Christ there.

This is the kind of man that Paul was. And so this was the impact he had on others! He didn't just teach with words that Christians should love each other. He taught through the example of a life that was lived consistently for the benefit of others.

And he did this through following the example of Christ, the one who gave up everything to serve us. He wrote: “Follow my

example, as I follow the example of Christ." 1 Corinthians 11:1.

If we want our church to become more loving, this is our challenge too. How do we influence others to become more loving?

- Not primarily through teaching them.
- Certainly not by criticising them.
- Rather it is by setting them an example by serving others in radical, sacrificial and selfless love.

Conclusion

So here are three Christians living out the servant heart of Christ in their lives:

- Caring for people's spiritual welfare,
- Meeting their practical needs
- Leading by example.

This is the attitude that God wants to see in each one of us, whoever we are and whatever our role in life.

- To humble ourselves and do everything we can to serve others in love.
- And so walk in the footsteps of Christ, who loved us and gave himself for us.

Andrew Burt
Enniscorthy Christian Fellowship
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