

TWO CHRIST CENTRED LIVES

READ Phil 2. 19-29

This passage gives plenty to think about the nature of being a Christian and the role of mentoring.



Paul and Timothy have worked together like father and son. Sons in the ancient middle East followed their fathers footsteps quite literally, watching, copying, and it was assumed the vast majority would follow their fathers into the family occupation. What profession you were going to be part of was predestined before your birth. Was this how it was for you?

As Timothy followed Paul closely an inmate bond, like father and son has formed, leading to Paul trusting the younger man to fully act as he would. When a Rabbi said follow me to a person, he did not mean once a month I will pop over for a cup of tea and we will chat about your spiritual life. A Rabbi and likewise Jesus were asking people to lay everything aside and follow his footsteps so closely you'd catch the dust kicked up behind the Rabbi's feet. It is where the saying comes from 'may you be covered in the dust of your Rabbi'.

QUESTION Take a moment to ask, whose footsteps you have followed in both in relation to your professional life and your faith? Is there anyone who has or is currently following you?

Since the industrial revolution the idea of being born into a profession has changed dramatically and continues to do so. There have been many benefits such as more opportunities, greater social mobility, and autonomy to make your own life choices. But we are increasingly seeing more negative results as people are feeling more anxious about their futures, lonely and disconnected from extended family with no one to guide them through these uncertain times. While the variety of jobs available can feel like freedom it can also be disorientating, with too much choice. Recently cultural commentators have spoken of a generation that have a fear to commit and specialise in any career path in case they become a prisoner to it. A fear of missing out, and a restriction of their future choices. This also translates to a commitment to a Christian lifestyle which is seen by many as too restrictive.

QUESTION With these thoughts in mind what do you think a Christian mentor should be like? Is there anything we can learn from this ancient approach to being mentored?

When presenting Timothy to the church what credentials does Paul list to earn their trust? Note that Paul doesn't say, 'Timothy is a wonderful teacher', or 'Timothy is a very devout and holy man', but, 'Timothy will genuinely care about you.' It is easy to place our ideals in education, qualifications or in some form of outward success but isn't this what most of us would really like to be like. To be known as someone who cares for others. This ideal breaks down the barriers of age, gender, doctrine, class etc we place around ourselves, it is obvious if someone genuinely cares for you and it is attractive. We all want to be seen, to be heard, to be loved. It is what Jesus specialised in.

Notice how human the rest of the passage is. Paul expresses emotions like anxiety, distress, illness almost leading to death. It is easy to think that Paul is some Christian guru shut away somewhere dispensing wisdom or that a real faith in God results in an easy life. But here Paul does not feel the need to hide anything from the young church in Philippi and by example we are encouraged to be fully human, facing all that life throws at us and being honest about the results. Paul like us believes in the Jesus, who 'was crucified in weakness, but lives by the power of God (2 Cor 13.4).

Don't be afraid to be vulnerable and ask for help from others around you, we are all disciples here.