

## Significance of Exceptionally Normal Service

### Philippians 2:19-24

*"For I have no one like him"*

**Introduction:** One of the exceptional models of servant leadership I've ever studied was the life of Col. Richard Winters, the commander of Easy Company of the 2nd Battalion, 506th Parachute Infantry Regiment, part of the 101st Airborne during WWII. A leader by example and courageous action, his military life was chronicled in the book and miniseries *Band of Brothers*. Not only was he decorated for valor during the war, but also earned the admiration, respect, and adulation of those he commanded, many attributing their lives to his leadership. When interviewed, Col. Winters said he never desired to be a hero, but served in a company of heroes, and longed to live out his days in peace, which he did as a normal businessman, selling chocolate byproducts from Hershey to producers of animal feed after running a small farm. He was humble about his service, even though he was pursued by countless others to tell about his life.

Juxtapose this life from that of Shirin Taber who wrote an article for Relevant Magazine entitled *"Trapped by the Search for Significance."*<sup>1</sup> She writes:

**"I have an insatiable need to feel extraordinary**, to be a woman of influence and to leave a mark on the world... Many of my peers—girlfriends, college students and young professionals I have worked among—are feeling the growing itch for significance too. **They want to know they matter and that their life has a purpose.** They want to help change the world for good, not just watch from the sidelines. I hear it in the way we talk about our dreams and vocational aspirations: 'I want to open a shelter for poor and disenfranchised women.' 'I want to make movies like Steven Spielberg.' 'I want to be a neurosurgeon.' **We believe our God-given destiny is where our greatest happiness lies.**

Gone are the days when 18-year-olds went off to college to find a spouse, had two or three kids and settled for a predictable life in suburbia. **We want to feel like individuals, unique and set apart.** Many of us embody a mixture of bohemian and bourgeois ideals, **seeking to find our distinguished space in the universe.** We like to try new things, and we wouldn't think twice about moving across the country to do medical research, pursue the big screen, go into politics, help with relief work or teach inner-city kids.

My hunger for significance is rooted in a desperate need to feel valued as a young woman from a broken home with a nominal religious upbringing. Perhaps you've felt like you've been there, too. Based on my work among college students and young professionals, I will venture to say that the drive for significance in many young women today is rooted in the desperation to feel known and to know that our lives count. **We're not just significance addicts, after all. We're hoping that if we can keep up with the big boys, then we will be truly worthwhile and interesting.**

On another level, my obsession with success is a cry for **attention, security** and, ultimately, the **need for spiritual healing.** I need my heavenly Father to show me that I matter to Him. The broken and missing parts still need to be restored. I long for **affirmation and validation.** When parents don't tell their children that they love them, they will look for other relationships and experiences to speak to their aching hearts. **The significance-shaped vacuum seeks the comfort of the world's applause."**

<sup>1</sup> [relevantmagazine.com/god/deeper-walk/features/20665-trapped-by-the-search-for-significance](http://relevantmagazine.com/god/deeper-walk/features/20665-trapped-by-the-search-for-significance)

The author went on to point out that this vacuum leads to perfectionism, and when one realizes you cannot "have it all", there is high level anxiety, fear, and shame.

Is this what we were created for? Is this what the call of gospel is on our lives, and what our identity in Christ produces? The answer is a resounding "NO". The last few weeks in Philippians we've looked at the life of Jesus, how He embodied **humility** and took on the form of a **servant**, not just acting like one. We looked at the life of Paul and that of **sacrifice**, where he was willing to lay down his life for the faith of others so they would find their greatest joy in Christ alone. But these two examples seem decently audacious, to live up the example of Jesus and Paul, one being God and the other the greatest missionary leader the world has ever known.

However, Paul then turns to **two other examples**, and he chooses to highlight two **very normal, average, and seemingly insignificant people** who will forever be carved on the pages of the eternal Word of God. The first of these is **Timothy**, who *showed that normal service in light of the gospel is exceptional, even among God's own*. When we find our identity in Christ and our greatest value IN HIM, we can walk through the seemingly insignificant things of life and know that in God's economy, we are not only doing the significant, but bringing glory to our exceptional God.

We will look at **5 principles of exceptionally normal service** from the ministry of Timothy to Paul and the church at Philippi so that we can embrace the same mindset and freedom that he possessed.

### 1. Exceptionally normal service is a result of trickle down discipleship

*"I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, so that I too may be cheered by news of you. **For I have no one like him...**" (2:19-20a)*

Paul considered Timothy a **kindred spirit**, or equal souled. He had called Timothy "my tried child in the faith" (1 Tim. 1:2), "my beloved son" (2 Tim. 1:2), "my beloved and faithful child in the Lord" (1 Cor. 4:17), "my fellow worker" (2 Cor. 1:1; 1 Thess. 3:2), and currently a fellow bond-servant of Christ Jesus (Phil. 1:1). Paul hoped to see the Philippian church in person (v. 24) for their mutual joy, but if he could not get there, he was going to send Timothy in his place. This was a **selfless act of Paul**, who was languishing in prison and who valued Timothy's friendship highly. What was clear was this: in Timothy, Paul was **sending his best**, not second rate, because the church at Philippi.

We first met Timothy in Acts 16, immediately preceding Paul's journey to Philippi. Timothy was raised in a mixed family. His mother was Jewish and his father was Greek, meaning there was a mixture of cultural values demonstrated and instilled. His mother was a **believer**, but there NO INDICATION his father was (Acts 16:1), so he was raised in an unequally yoked family. He was taught the scriptures from his mom and grandma (2 Tim. 1:5), but not his dad. He was willing to follow Paul and leave his home, family, friends, and as it turns out, a life of marriage and family, even willing to get circumcised for the sake of the ministry he'd undertake, even as an adult. (Acts 16:3). He became a follower of Christ and a disciple of Paul, as well as being a trusted and faithful friend and partner in ministry.

This illustrates a great discipleship relationship. Matthew 10:25 says "It is enough for the disciple that he become as his teacher, and the slave as his master." Timothy had not simply followed Paul, **he had become like him in thought, passion, objectives, and mindset**. This was so much so, that when Paul told the Corinthian church to follow his example, he said he was sending Timothy as a reminder of who

Paul was and what he did. "I exhort you, be imitators of me. For this reason I have sent to you Timothy, who is my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, and he will remind you of my ways which are in Christ, just as I teach everywhere in every church (1 Cor. 4:16-17)".

We make disciples who will make disciples. In other words, God's call on our life is that as we follow Christ with our life we call others to follow us, which begs us to answer two key questions: **do I live a life that exemplifies a follower of Christ, and am I calling others to follow me?** This begins at home with our kids and moves out from there.

## 2. Exceptionally Normal Service Values People Over Programs

*... "who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare."*

If our identity is ultimately in what *we do and accomplish*, we will point to general numbers rather than individuals (we had \_\_\_\_\_ people at church; we raised \_\_\_\_\_ money). There was nothing different in Paul's day. It is always easier to validate accomplishment based on external markers rather than by maturity of individuals. Notice that what set Timothy apart was NOT his organizational expertise, or intellectual acumen, or that he was a great writer, speaker, or someone people flocked to. No, he set himself apart simply by the fact that he cared about the welfare, and specifically the spiritual welfare of the Philippian church.

The word "concerned" here is the same word used 4:6, which is translated "anxious". This was not a sinful type of anxiety, worried about money or circumstances of life. But just as his mentor Paul, Timothy was more concerned for the welfare and spiritual progress of others over his own.

*"I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked. <sup>28</sup> Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches." (2 Corinthians 11:27-28)*

Timothy, like Paul, knew that people are eternal, so investment in the life of individuals is eternal. He believed we are to "Love God and love others", that making disciples of all nations is a personal and relational venture, and that working with people is unequivocally difficult. This is why Timothy was not set apart from those outside of the church, but from those inside.

Ministry is made up of a myriad of differing possibilities and expressions, but one constant is present: we serve to care for, reach, and love people. This is one of the best ways to evaluate how we spend our time or construct programs: *how does this help us love real people, serving not just a general cause, but actual individual lives.*

## 3. Exceptionally Normal Service Engages in Sacrificial Care

*"They all seek their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ."*

Paul explains further. He gives a general statement of those in Rome that "sought after" their own interests, not those of Christ Jesus. The word for "seek" is in the present tense, meaning they are continually seeking their own things.

Who are “they” in this verse? They were those who made up the church at Rome. Timothy was the opposite. He first and foremost continually sought after the interests of Christ and His Kingdom. Is this crazy and unique? Absolutely not, but simply the call of discipleship

**Matthew 6:33** – But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.”

Message to Ephesus: **Revelation 2:4** “But I have this against you, that you have left your first love.”

What was the church at Rome seeking after? The text does not say, but they most likely were seeking the same thing you and I seek. A nice home, leisure, pleasure, relaxation, a good job, fun with family, etc... **Timothy was not contrasted with the sinful men of Rome, but the lethargic of the Church!** We so easily get caught up in the same life that when truly is examined is truly focused on our own interests, and not of the kingdom

### What does this sacrificial care of the interests of Christ look like?

In the **church**, its serving in ways that are out of your comfort zone, interacting with people that you normally would not, and doing what no one else is willing to do. I love the stories coming out of Rancho, since there are very few programs, all the people involved must help with everything from child care to custodial, whether that is an area of comfort or not. We are growing in our maturity as a church when we do not have to **convince and recruit people** to serve in kids, youth, college, music, tech, and counseling ministries, but we have people who are willing to seek the interests of others.

In the **community**, we want to be a beacon of truth, a place where the light of God's Word shines brightly, whether or not that is embraced or not. But we also want to be active in our service to our community, both in normal, ongoing ways and in crises. When we are only known for our teaching, we are lopsided in communicating the love of Christ, giving only part of the story. As a corporate unit and individual parts, we want to seek to serve others in our community. What our community needs desperately is not more **entertainment, but real friendship and help in what tends to fall apart: marriages, parenting, and relationships.**

In the **home**, we seek to serve sacrificially those whom God has called us to live with. Perhaps this is exemplified in no greater way than when family members give up jobs, freedom, and hobbies to take care of loved ones. We have two women in our shepherding group who have done this for years and months respectively. This is the type of sacrifice that has to be ground in the reality of God's sovereignty, identity in Christ, and the leading of the Spirit because unlike raising kids who will grow up and leave, taking care of a loved one in the twilight of life has no such upside. There is no greater love than laying down your life for a friend (John 15:13), and no greater expression of this love than laying down your life day after day, month after month, with no tangible reward.

### 4. Exceptionally Normal Service is Produced by Proven Character

*“But you know Timothy's proven worth...”*

**Character is:** who you are over time. Character has everything to do with motivation and the reason behind why we do anything, even more than **what** we end up doing. Character is proven over time, since anyone can fake anything for a time as long as its worth getting. Godly character is tested in the

furnace of failure rather than mere success, since how one responds to sinful revelation will set the course for future integrity.

Timothy had proven his character over time. He was raised in the Scripture, which created a foundation of knowledge and future wisdom (This is why we believe in raising our children in a Biblical education --- regardless of where they go to school---so that they can draw on this in later life). He had a good reputation in his early life so that when Paul came to town, he heard about him and recruited him as a partner in ministry. Timothy had been with Paul in trials, persecutions, accusations, and rejection and had stayed the course. Paul had entrusted Timothy with the ministry in Thessalonica (Acts 17:14) and Macedonia (Acts 19:21-22) when he had to leave abruptly. Timothy was not perfect, but was consistent and faithful, which made him useful in the hands of the redeemer.

There are **two significant principles to glean here:**

### 1. Proven character demands consistent evaluation:

**2 Corinthians 13:5** - Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you-- unless, of course, you fail the test?

**1 Thessalonians 5:21** - But examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good;

**1 Corinthians 11:28** - But a man must examine himself, and in so doing he is to eat of the bread and drink of the cup.

### 2. Proven character means everything matters - starting with the small

We want significance without work, accomplishment without pain, service without sacrifice, glory without the cross. Timothy was used in God's hand because of the countless hours of study, the relentless battle with his sin, and the willingness to do what is insignificant. What happens with us is that we neglect what helps shape and grow our character, minimizing the significance of discipline for the purpose of godliness. We neglect our life in the church to do something great for God, our wives to do something significant at work, and our kids for fulfillment in a hobby.

### 5. Exceptionally Normal Service Comes from Total Commitment

*"...how as a son with a father he has served with me in the gospel. I hope therefore, to send him just as soon as I see how it will with me."*

### 1. Service means there is a new family relationship

**Matthew 10:37-40** – ““He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. <sup>38</sup> “And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me. <sup>39</sup> “He who has found his life will lose it, and he who has lost his life for My sake will find it.

**1 Timothy 5:1-2** - *Do not rebuke an older man but encourage him as you would a father. **Treat younger men like brothers, older women like mothers, younger women like sisters, in all purity.***

The gospel called Timothy to have a different view of his earthly family than he had before. He still loved his mother and I'm sure he tried to share the gospel with his dad, but he also knew his life was now all of Christ's. This led him to follow Paul as a spiritual father in the furtherance of the gospel. Notice here that Timothy was **submissive to Paul**, yet Paul treated him like a brother as he **served WITH him in the gospel**. This has repercussions as we interact with both younger and older, treating each other with respect and unity, looking to lead without lording.

## 2. Service means we have to leave margin in life

Timothy could go to Philippi because he had created margin in his life to do so. He was open to God's plan and kept his own with an open hand. Sometimes we miss true ministry opportunities to serve people with the love of Christ because we simply have no time since all of our life is accounted for. When we do get some margin, we are so burned out that we have to use the time to recover rather than extend to others. That is why we must be purposeful with our commitment. In an age where possibilities seem endless, we must remember that we CANNOT do it all and must choose what is most important. If serving people has value, we must say "No" to other things, even if they are "good" things.

What made Timothy exceptional? Not his upbringing. Not his talent. Not his accomplishment. Not his intellect. What made him significant was his genuine care for people, his commitment to the interests of Christ, and his willingness to follow in obedience. He had a clear understanding of who he was in Christ and what was most valuable. He would say he was no hero, but served in a community of heroes.

What needs to change in our thinking, schedules, and habits of life to take on the same mindset as Timothy? We live full, busy, face-paced, pressure filled lives that call us to be safe, seek comfort, and find the easy. But we are not called this but something greater. Something that exemplifies **exceptionally normal service**.

### Questions to Discuss:

**When was a time that you did something that you felt was significant? How did you feel? What made this action or activity different or exceptional?**

**What ways does discipleship look different?** Who has been influential in your life? What did that look like? Who would say you are significant in their life?

**People are more important than programs, but programs are not bad.** How do we evaluate the programs we are involved in, whether they are worth our time or not?

**What does selfless service look like for you in this church?** Why do we sometimes struggle with serving here?

**What hinders us from growing in our character?**

**How do we create more margin in life for the sake of service?**