

Philippians 4:8,9 **“Brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable -- if anything is excellent or praiseworthy -- think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me --put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.”**

Dear Reflectors of Christ's Light:

Today we are going to talk about the “character issue.” No, this isn't about the presidential campaign. We get so much of that every day our heads are ready to explode. We're going to talk about something more important: **our** character. This is one of the things that the apostle Paul is addressing in his letter to the Philippians as he reminds us of this truth: **Christians Are Role Models**. The Lord wants us to (1) ***Follow Christian role models***, and (2) ***Serve as Christian role models***.

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Paul's letter to the Philippians is often called a “letter of joy.” It is bright, upbeat, and encouraging. But here's what's interesting. Did you know that he wrote this letter from prison? So here is Paul, the greatest Christian missionary ever, stuck sitting in prison for confessing Christ. Why, then, does he have all this joy when most people would be bitter and depressed? He explains in chapter 3: ***“I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in him”*** (Php 3:8). The peace of Christ, that ***“transcends all understanding”*** (Php 4:7), filled Paul with joy and guided his attitudes and way of life.

Paul wanted his dear friends in Philippi to have the same joy and peace and also to share it with a broken world in need of a total makeover. Therefore he encourages them in their Christian character: ***“Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me -- put it into practice.”*** He's telling these brand new Christians to follow his example, to use him as a role model. That may sound arrogant, but Paul certainly isn't bragging. He once called himself ***“the worst of sinners”*** (1 Tm 1:16). But, by grace, he was now living a new life in Christ, guided by the light of God's Word, and he wanted these new Christians living in a pagan society to have a different pattern to follow than the many godless role models in the world of his day.

God often encourages us in the Bible to follow the example of Christian men and women who have walked before us. Earlier in this letter he wrote, ***“Join with others in following my example...Take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you”*** (Php 3:17). The author of the letter to the Hebrews wrote, ***“Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith”*** (Heb 13:7,17). In that same book of Hebrews, chapter 11, we are given a whole list of people who, by the power and prompting of God, displayed lives of faith for us to follow: **Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Moses**, to name a few.

These are the kind of role models Paul wanted them to follow. Imitate the faith, attitude, decisions, and God-pleasing choices made by believers like **Samuel, Deborah**, the **healed leper** who returned to thank Jesus, the **good Samaritan** who loved his neighbor and even his enemy, and many more! We, today, have many wonderful role models too. We can imitate the faith of our Christian grandpas and grandmas and the senior members of our congregation who worship the Lord regularly and serve him humbly and faithfully. Imitate the faith of our Christian teachers who give of themselves to and for the sake of the Lord's children -- even in trying times like this pandemic. Paul is saying, ***“Follow them, Christians. Follow these wonderful God-given role models!”***

But Paul is saying more. Follow Christian role models, yes, but also **be** Christian role models to others. He writes, *“Brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable -- if anything is excellent or praiseworthy -- think about such things”* and *“put it into practice.”*

Paul understood well that the way we think has a huge influence on the way we live and speak. What occupies our minds eventually determines our words and actions. Paul says that God wants us to meditate on, to be involved with, things that are *“true, noble, right, and pure.”* He wants us to focus our minds not on sinister, hateful, spiteful, immoral things that turn our minds into cesspools of selfishness and self-gratification, but rather focus on what is *“lovely (pleasing), admirable, and praiseworthy.”* And then, God says, *“put into practice”* these things so others might see, learn, and follow.

Here is an axiom: **“You are a believer therefore you are a role model.”** I’ve heard some professional athletes say, *“I don’t want to be a role model. That’s not my job.”* Too late. Children look up to athletes. They are influenced by what athletes say and do. The same is true for us. You and I **are** role models. We have no say in the matter. The question is, *what kind* of role model are we? We can be lousy role models or we can be good role models. We can be role models of **kindness** or **hated**, of **generosity** or **stinginess**, of **morality** or **immorality**, of **gratitude** or **complaining**, of eagerness and joy in hearing the Word or of apathy and indifference to what God says. The next generation learns from our leadership -- or lack of it.

How does a preschool or kindergarten student learn how to print and write? Not only do Mrs. Loescher and Mrs. Hinn give the young students a piece of paper, the teachers provide patterns. The child begins by looking at that pattern and tracing or matching it. It’s done daily, repeatedly, over and over again, so that it becomes **ingrained**.

Think about the many regrettable, disappointing role models our youth have today. It can scare us to our very cores to think that such strange words, actions, and philosophies are being **ingrained** in our children. It doesn’t pay to do the ostrich thing and bury our heads in the sand and hope our young people will find good and right role models on their own. No, God says the responsibility is ours to teach, train, and ingrain -- no matter how much work it takes.

You see, the stakes are eternal.

Christ Jesus, our loving Redeemer, besides providing us with eternal life by forgiving our many sins through his perfect life and perfect, sacrificial death, also provides us with the perfect pattern for godly living. We want one and all, in order to bring glory to the Savior, to have more precious souls in heaven, and to make the world in which we live a better place, to be able to see Jesus through us. It is our great privilege and joy, like Paul, to be the Savior’s role models.

Amen.