

Introduction:

A. *Illus.*: I loved the Andy Griffith Show. It was probably my reason for naming our son Andy. I've read that a lot of people think the best episode ever was the one with Opie and the birds. The story was that Andy's little boy, Opie, shot a mother bird with his slingshot and killed her. So then Andy made him take care of the three baby birds, whom Opie named Winkin, Blinkin and Nod. Of course, Opie comes to love those little birds but then the day comes when he has to let them go. He worries that they might not be able to fly or fend for themselves. Here's the ending:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8BMjtwp8n6A> [begin at 1:00]

[Opie lifts the cage off the hook on the porch and walks into the yard and says to the birds, "I hope I did all the right things. I hope you can fly away. Please fly away. Please." And one by one he releases them, with a look of satisfaction. "They're ok, Pa. They all flew off ok. I guess I did a good job, huh Pa?" "You sure did son." "The cage sure looks awful empty, don't it, Pa." "Yes son, it sure does, but don't the trees seem nice and full."]

B. I don't want this sermon to get sappy but I think of that episode sometimes when I sing yet another farewell benediction for someone we've come to love whom God assigns to another place. One of our VCL Core Values is: **Village Church is often home to believers in transitions related to education and jobs.** We value the healing of those who come to us wounded and the training of future leaders for ongoing ministry. We love to put our fingerprints on those who pass through our congregation as our means of extending the influence of our church. Because God has entrusted us with students from Trinity International University, we are committed to being a Mentoring Church in order to do our part in shaping the Christian leaders of the future.

As we begin our 40th anniversary celebration I want to focus on this particular privilege. This isn't *all* we do at Village Church, but this is one of our God-given tasks.

- C. Turn to **Phil. 2:19-23**. The Apostle Paul wrote this letter from prison but his heart was with the churches he loved, and here it was the church in Philippi—where he’d met Lydia, where he and Silas had been in prison when God set them free and the jailer was converted. He hadn’t heard any news from them in a long time. He says at the beginning, *“God can testify how I long for all of you with the affection of Christ Jesus.”* He wondered how they were doing, whether they were growing in Christ, whether the conflicts he’d heard about were still doing damage. So he decided to make an enormous sacrifice: **2:19**, *“I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, that I also may be cheered when I receive news about you. I have no one else like him...”* In prison, yet he sends his best.
- D. It is our special privilege as a church to send many of our beloved adopted sons and daughters out to serve the Lord elsewhere. We want to nurture men and women like Timothy. Not everyone who comes is like him but today we focus on our role together in touching such lives.

I. WE WANT TO PUT OUR FINGERPRINTS ON THOSE WHO ARE GENUINELY CONCERNED FOR THE WELFARE OF GOD’S PEOPLE (2:20-21)

- A. The idea behind the word ‘genuinely’ is concern that is in his blood. Like DNA. Concern for Christ’s church was Timothy’s calling in life. God gives some people like that to us here at Village Church. Some come to us as students and we adopt them into this family. Some may be our own sons and daughters. Others may be lay people among us whom God calls out to serve his people in some way they never expected. **But we look for those who seem to have it in their blood to serve Jesus and his church.**
- B. What do you think Paul had in mind when he spoke of “the welfare of God’s people”? If that’s someone’s passion what would we see them investing in? Look at some examples of the things he wrote to this church about: **1:9-11, 27, 3:20; 4:8...** Paul was going to send Timothy to the Philippians because those were Timothy’s concerns as well.

That hasn't changed. Our students get an extraordinary theological education at Trinity but we here are especially entrusted with drawing them into that truth lived out in the church. More than one student has said that they learned as much at Village Church as they did in seminary. Think of that responsibility! Think of that privilege!

- C. How do we nurture that genuine concern for the church? All these former attenders have told us some of the ways—Growth Groups, prayer, the tone of our worship services, dinners, baby showers, and the mentoring we do.

Illus.: One of our beloved former families was **Brian & Jennifer Dean**. She was studying counseling and he was in a Ph.D. program in philosophy. I remember the Mother's Day nine years ago when we dedicated their new son, Anselm, along with Brian and Maria Chastain's little boy, Luke. After the service, little Isabel Dean wondered if I could dedicate her baby doll. In her wonderful letter to VCL, **Jennifer Dean** wrote:

Your Body took this young couple in. You loved on us. You talked about how to do life with Christ. You showed us how to do life with Christ. You taught us how to struggle and you taught us it was ok to struggle. We are forever grateful for the love and foundation in the Lord that you gave us. You built us up and the Lord sent us out.

Today- we continue to participate in the body of Christ at Church at Charlotte. Small groups are the fabric in which our early married life was woven so we continue to create space for small groups today. Now - we host showers for people we hardly know. We are also a part of a group of folks helping to launch another campus of Church at Charlotte in Matthews, NC.

- D. To give up such people is a great sacrifice. How often we've cried at those benedictions. It was even a greater sacrifice for Paul. He said, "*I have no one else like him.*" We, of course, don't have much of a choice about giving up so many precious people. They fly the nest. New people come but no one ever really replaces those who leave. It is hard to keep saying goodbye and starting over. We can

learn from Paul in **v.19**, “...*that I may be cheered when I receive news about you.*” He means, when Timothy finally returns it will be worth it because then Paul will hear about the Lord’s work in Philippi.

Remember the Sunday we heard about **Pastor Tony and Julie Minell** and their church in tiny Dresser, WI. They were seeing so many people coming to the Lord they didn’t know where to put them. Then a guy gave them his bar! And that’s where they meet now!

We send out all these people—not only students but so many folks—15-20 percent of our people each year—and sometimes we hear how God is using them, or how the churches and ministries they serve are thriving in Christ. And that is our reward. Like **Dave Schultz** who planted this church in Grayling, MI. Or **Doria & Kazu Yamazaki-Ransom** in Japan. She has her own English school with 20 adults and 70 kids and he is an influential New Testament professor.

II. WE WANT TO PUT OUR FINGERPRINTS ON THOSE WHO SURRENDER SELF-INTEREST FOR THE WORK OF THE GOSPEL (2:21)

- A. **V.21...** Paul knew many people who loved the church. In Rom. 16 he names nearly 30 of them. In the very next paragraph he honors Epaphroditus. I’m not sure that this is a complaint or simply a recognition that he had no one else who could drop everything and go far away in the service of Jesus. But one thing is clear: there is a level of Christian service that not many can or will do. Sometimes serving Jesus Christ requires tremendous sacrifice.
- B. God sends self-sacrificing people like Timothy to us and we have the high privilege of investing in their lives. They come from other churches who have loved and invested in them. But here we see so many who make significant sacrifices to serve Christ.

Twelve years ago a Burmese pastor, **Ngung Iap**, began attending. He had fled Myanmar, warned by a friendly policeman that authorities were coming for him. He left his

wife behind, married only six weeks. He was granted political asylum in the U.S. The church back home asked him to continue his studies as long as he was here. It was terribly hard for him—he was desperately lonely and his English just wasn't good enough for Ph.D. studies. In a miraculous answer to prayer, his wife was allowed to come and Ngung Iap found a small group of Burmese Christians in Chicago whom he could help. There was a man who sacrificed for Christ.

They are always among us—students who scrape and struggle just so they can serve Jesus. Like Pastor **Ezekiel and Lizzie Ajani** from Nigeria and **Chin Hong and Lishan Yee**, who are separated for months while he finishes his dissertation here. Andrew and Sarah Seaman, now in Omaha, have been waiting and working for 10 years in order to be missionaries in Japan.

Several years ago I remember standing with **Doug Becker** in a parking lot at Trinity. Doug was an excellent scholar and preacher. For a student like that, finding chances to preach are a big deal. A small church in the western suburbs had asked Doug to preach regularly. My heart sank at the thought of losing him and Jamie, but you can't let an opportunity like that go by. But then he got tears in his eyes. *"I can't leave my Sunday School class,"* he said. His class consisted of two children, Chatham and Emma Hedges. He gave up the chance to preach so he and Jamie could take care of that class. Today he is the pastor of New Beginnings Bible Church in Rockaway, NJ.

III. WE WANT TO PUT OUR FINGERPRINTS ON THOSE WHO HAVE PROVEN THEMSELVES IN THE WORK OF THE GOSPEL (2:22)

A. **V.22...** Ministry students don't simply prove themselves in the classroom. They prove themselves in church. That's where we come in.

One of the things I realized early on here was that it would be my duty to give references to churches and other ministries for students who served here. I knew I would have to be very honest because the health of those other

ministries would be on the line when they hired someone. I realized I had to be frank with students and straightforward as a reference. A few haven't been teachable. Some were too proud or stubborn. Some have had sins that were hindrances. Some were great people but clearly weren't called to be pastors or missionaries or teachers.

Illus.: I remember a call early one Sunday morning from a pastor friend of mine. One of our students was interviewing with him that weekend and it wasn't going well. Our man had just been too proud and presumptuous. "Lee, would you hire this guy?" he asked. I hemmed and hawed a moment and then told him no. That young man came home pretty humbled. He got the message and in due time, he did become a pastor, serving to this day.

- B. Timothy was like a son to Paul. "*As a son with his father he has served with me in the work of the gospel.*" What an apprenticeship! What a great reference! For us here at VCL we share this parental task of being like ministry fathers and mothers to the sons and daughters God brings us. The letters we've received often refer to people here who shaped these young leaders' view of church and ministry.

So how utterly crucial it is that we all own this responsibility of being models and mentors to those God entrusts to us! Elders: they're watching us. Growth Groups: they're seeing what Christian fellowship is like in you. They watch our worship services and fellowship times, how we love our kids and take care of our missionaries, how we handle trouble, and our frustrations with each other. They learn a model of church life from us—that church is our first home. They see how we "paint with the colors God gives us," and how we value prayer or handle money or think about success. We are their church fathers and mothers. They are our ministry sons and daughters—our heirs scattered all over the world.

Illus.: A couple weeks ago I had a message that a man had been trying to reach me. He needed a reference for one of our former interns—a guy I'm very proud of. We talked and I was happy to recommend him. The message light on

my phone was blinking and, interestingly, it was someone else wanting a reference for another of our former interns, another one of our best. I spoke with the lady and quickly figured out she was on the same search committee for the same church! Two of our finest guys being considered for the same congregation. When I finished talking to each one I said, *“If you call this man, you’d better take good care of him and his family! They are precious people to us.”*

Conclusion

Paul planned to send Timothy far away to Philippi because he cared about that church more than his own welfare. His goal was to *“be cheered when I receive news about you.”*

For 40 years Village Church has been sending out servants of Jesus into places all over the world. They are not only pastors, missionaries and professors, they are business people, musicians, counselors, police, soldiers and sailors, doctors and nurses, teachers and servants of every sort. They leave here and step into churches, small and large, and they bring with them what they learned here among us. They raise their children to love the church because they know that the church is how Jesus loves his people. And they learned that here.

They learned here that bigger isn’t necessarily better. That a church is rich when it has children and grandparents together. That worship can be thoughtful and creative and earnest led by ordinary people. That the Bible is rich and nourishing to the soul, and worth every minute we can give it. They learned that the Body of Christ is a inestimable gift of God. And we’ve been cheered to receive word of God’s work in the places they go.

Illus.: Three years ago we went back home to South Dakota to see my mom. **Mike and Rebecca Honl**, our former intern, had just become the pastor of my little home church out on a remote hill ten miles from the nearest tiny town. I was proud as punch! It happened that Mike’s text that morning was this very passage. And when he read, *“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,”* ... well, I wept for the privilege we have of putting our fingerprints on such sons and daughters.