What do the following people all have in common?
Mike Yarwood, Rory Bremner, Jon Culshaw,
Alistair McGowan, Ronnie Ancona.
They are all impressionists, impersonators,
imitators of famous people.

I wonder how good you are at impressions,
at impersonating others?
It's an important question, because, if you are a Christian,
that is what you are called to be –
an impersonator, an imitator of Jesus Christ.

In chapter 2 Paul calls us
to have the same mindset as Christ Jesus –
to be committed to what he was committed to,
and so to live as he lived.
To live our lives as imitators of Jesus.

Then in the second half of chapter 2
he has shown us how two of his friends,
Timothy and Epaphroditus, have done exactly that,
imitating Jesus in the way they live.

And now, in chapter 3,
Paul shows us how *he* seeks to do the same –
to be an impersonator, an imitator of Jesus.

In chapter 2 he shows us how although Jesus was God,
he did not consider his equality with God
something to be used to his own advantage,
but instead emptied himself of all the glory of heaven
to become a servant of others.
A Jesus who found his identity
not in the independent exercise of his own will,
but in humble obedience to the will of his Father.

And here in chapter 3
we see how Paul seeks to imitate this Jesus.
Like Jesus, *he* doesn't use *his* glory,
his pedigree, his ancestry, his upbringing, his education –
circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel,
of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews,
in regard to the law, a Pharisee –
all these things are his glory,
but he doesn't use them to his own advantage,
but empties himself of them all, considering them loss,
considering them garbage, worthless,
compared to the surpassing worth
of knowing Christ Jesus as Lord.
He doesn't find his confidence, his identity, in all these things
in all he has achieved, as surely he might,
but instead finds his identity,
what, in v.9, he calls his 'righteousness',
not in anything *he* has done,
in the independent exercise of his own will,
but in humble acceptance of what *Christ* has done for him,
'through faith in Christ'.

And what does ‘faith in Christ’ entail?
Is it just a matter of believing in him
and in what he has done for me?
Not according to Paul.
For Paul, faith in Christ means impersonating Christ,
imitating the Christ who ‘humbled himself
by becoming obedient to death –
even death on a cross.’
Look at v.10. For Paul, faith in Christ, knowing Christ,
means participating in his sufferings,
becoming like Christ in his death –
imitating him in his suffering and death.

Christ laid down his life so that others might live.
Faith in Christ means being ready to do the same –
to sacrifice *my* interests so that the lives of others
might be enriched.
As Paul puts it in chapter 2,
in humility valuing others above myself,
looking not to my own interests but to the interests of others,
being ready to lay down *my* desires, *my* preferences,
that which is to *my* advantage,
for the sake of the desires, preferences, advantages
of others –
becoming like him in his death.

And that is exactly what Paul has done –
imitating Jesus, he has laid aside his own interests
for the sake of bringing the good news of Jesus
to the Philippians,
even though it has meant ending up in prison,
very possibly facing execution,
for doing so.

Perhaps this doesn’t sound the most attractive of prospects.
But, remember, Jesus did not stay dead.
In fact, what does Paul go on to say in chapter 2?
Precisely *because* of his obedience to his Father’s will,
‘Therefore, God exalted him to the highest place
and gave him the name that is above every name,
that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow.’
Through the suffering of death to the glory of resurrection.

And what does Paul call himself and us to in v.10?
To imitate Christ: to participate in his sufferings,
becoming like him in his death,
and so, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.
Through the challenges of putting other people’s needs
and interests first in our lives,
to the glory of resurrection life in all its fullness,
beginning now and continuing through death for evermore.
Imitating Christ.

But how are people like us to become imitators
of the most humble, courageous, self-sacrificial person
who ever lived?

We are to do it in exactly the same way that
Jon Curshaw, Rory Bremner and Alistair McGowan
achieve the brilliance of their impersonations:
by looking as closely as we can
at the Person we are trying to imitate;
listening with the greatest attention to his every word;
paying the closest possible attention
to his ways, his life, his words.

And where are we to look to find this person?
We find him in the Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John,
as we read a few verses each day,
as we reflect slowly and carefully on what we have read,
and so meet with the living Lord Jesus
who waits to meet us there.

Then, as the apostle Paul puts it,
as we contemplate the Lord's glory in this way,
we will be transformed into his image,
from one degree of glory to the next;
or, as *we* might put it,
as, day by day, we look carefully at Jesus,
we will become better and better impersonators
of the most beautiful person who has ever lived.