

Whose Example Are You Following? (Part 2)

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[0 : 00] A social worker was sitting at her desk one day, looking out a window at some children playing on a playground close by.

A bunch of guys, boys playing soccer. Well, she noticed on the side of the field there was one boy, and he was just hobbling around more than a limp.

He just was just not able to hardly stand, much less walk. And so she decided she was going to go and just talk with him and see what was going on, maybe cheer him up a little bit.

Well, she went out and approached him, and he was very friendly, talked with her. And she finally asked him, well, what's wrong with your foot?

Why are you not able to be out here and run? What happened? He said, well, I had an accident on the soccer field. I broke a bone in my foot.

[1 : 03] She said, well, what did the doctor say? What's the situation? He said, well, my parents didn't really think it was that big a deal.

They thought it would heal, but it hasn't. Some of you teachers in this room, you can relate, can't you, unfortunately? Well, this social worker had a doctor friend, and she took the boy to the doctor, and he looked at it, and he said, it's going to take some, it needs to be rebroken, set properly in order for it to heal.

And there was something like Samaritan's Health Clinic, this is in Pickens County, that was willing to do that. And so this little boy had the surgery, had his foot broken, set, and over a period of, you know, a couple of months, three months maybe, it was a little drawn-out process, he fully recovered.

He was back on the soccer field as if nothing had happened. Well, that social worker, she was rightfully proud that she did more than just feel sorry for him, that she got involved, that she tried to help him, and, you know, just thrilled at the results.

Well, years later, she told this story to a women's club, and she asked the question, would you like to know where the boy is today?

[2 : 33] Well, he is in the state penitentiary. And she said, I was so busy trying to help him run that I forgot to teach him how to walk, and what she was talking about, how to live.

I want you to think about it. We. It is vitally important that we teach Christians, younger Christians, immature Christians, how to walk, how to live.

And you know as well as I do, one of the most important ways we do that is by our example. And that's what Paul is talking about in Philippians chapter 3, verses 17 through 21.

He's talking about the importance of having the right kind of examples or models that we can imitate, that we can learn from them by watching them and be like them.

And at the same time, he's talking about how it's important that each one of us as Christians be so faithful, so committed, so sold out to the Lord that other people can imitate us.

[3 : 47] Turn back, if you would, to Philippians chapter 3. We're going to begin reading in verse 17. Last week we looked at primarily the wrong example, the bad example.

Today we're going to focus on the right example, the right kind of example we need to be and we need to follow. Philippians 3, 17. Brothers, join in imitating me and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us.

He's talking about his fellow missionaries like Timothy. When he wrote this letter, he included Timothy in the greeting, in the opening to Paul and Timothy. For many of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ.

Their end is destruction. Their God is their belly. And they glory in their shame with minds set on earthly things. But our citizenship is in heaven.

And from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself.

[4 : 59] Paul is contrasting two basic examples of behavior that are found among professing Christians. He's holding up two examples that can be seen in a lot of churches.

And what he's telling us is we've got to make an intentional effort, an intentional effort to note and follow the right example and to note and reject the influence of the wrong examples.

Let's look at it. Last week we looked at this first part, the bad examples like this. Don't follow the example of fake Christians. Paul warns us not to follow the example of everyone who claims to be a Christian.

See, we looked at it last week and I won't go into detail. It's on, you can get a copy of this on our website. We'll look at it again on the website. Paul is writing to the church about these people, he says, with tears.

I've told you about it before. These are people that he knows, he cares about. It broke his heart that there were Christians or professing Christians who just walked away from the Lord.

[6 : 16] They stayed in the church, but they lived such ungodly lives that he had to warn the rest of the church, don't follow their example. So he's telling us here, we need to be on guard for fake Christians in the church.

Look at it again. For many of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears, walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. There are fake Christians. People who profess to be Christians but are not in the church.

Among God's people we're talking about. Now we can identify some fake Christians because they show no signs of spiritual life. I want you to look at what he says about them in these verses.

They focus on satisfying their sensual or physical appetites. That's why he says their God is their belly. They live by what feels good to them.

They are proud of what they should be ashamed of. He says they glory in their shame. And then he says they have a worldly view of life with minds set on earthly things. I think it's important that we define what earthly things are here.

[7 : 21] Frank Thielman does a good job of explaining. Earthly things are not the practical affairs of everyday life. But things that characterize worldly life. A life that opposes God.

A life that ignores God. We know that these fake Christians are not real for several reasons.

But the bottom line is because they end up in hell. He says their end is destruction. That was last week's message. Don't follow the example of fake Christians.

Don't be an example of a fake Christian. Let's move on now to the good example. Follow the example of faithful Christians.

Follow the example of real Christians. Let's first look at this. We need to identify faithful Christians in our church. And learn from them. See Paul is writing to a church.

[8 : 24] He's not only going to say imitate me. But others like me that you can see and know. Look at this. Brothers join in imitating me. And keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us.

Paul modeled faithful Christian living. And he told Christians who knew him. Who saw him. Who interacted with him. Imitate me.

He didn't just do it in the Philippian church. He did it in some other churches. Like the church at Corinth. But Paul wasn't trying to build himself up. He wasn't trying to build a following.

He didn't want disciples of Paul. He was trying to help people become disciples of Jesus. And so just so we understand. He didn't just hold himself up. Look. He also held up other faithful Christians. Who were worth imitating. Keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us. And then he told the Thessalonians.

[9 : 25] Imitate us. His fellow workers. Paul did this because he knew that some aspects of Christian living is better caught than taught.

You know, you learn a lot about, for example. You can learn a lot about how to pray by listening to somebody pray. You can learn a lot about being involved in church by looking at who's involved, how they're involved.

Watching, following their example. We need to understand that Paul never thought of himself or other leaders that he's calling attention to as super Christians.

He's not thinking of himself as some kind of unique, no one can ever be like me example. Not at all. He's holding up himself and these other Christians in this situation as just examples of what it means to be a Christian.

Example of what it means to be a faithful Christian. A committed Christian. We need to understand something this morning. Christian commitment is the same for everybody.

[10:33] Christian commitment. They're not different levels. It's the same for everybody. Leaders and followers. Men and women. Old and young.

In the preceding verses of this chapter that we've looked at in days gone by, Paul explained his commitment in terms of he wanted to have a growing relationship with his Lord.

He wanted to know Jesus better. He wanted to become more like him. He explains that. They're sort of in the middle of chapter 3. Well, he goes on in verse 15 to make it clear that he considers this every Christian's commitment.

Look at this verse. After he talked about how he wasn't perfect, he hadn't arrived, he strained to become more of what he should be, to know Christ, to become like him.

He said, let those of us who are mature think this way. And if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal that also to you.

[11:41] Paul's writing to the church that he loved. He's not talking here to or about false teachers.

He's trying to help them all to understand what I'm explaining about being a growing Christian, being a committed Christian. This is what God expects for every mature Christian.

But he knew that only God could change a person's mind. Only God can change minds in here this morning. You think about this. As a preacher, if you're a Sunday school teacher or a teacher in other ways in the church, or if you're just trying to explain something to a younger Christian to help them better understand God's Word and live it out, we can teach it, we can explain it, we can illustrate it, we can try to model it.

But only God can turn the light on for them and help them say, yes, I see it, I understand it, I believe it, this is how I want to live.

Only God can do that in a person's life. And that's basically what he's saying here, that God, he's confident that God would in time give them the same desire and ability to become more like Jesus, just like he does, just like mature Christians do.

[13:06] Over the past 25 years, I have observed good examples of what it means to be a committed Christian in this church. Some of those people that I look to as good examples are now in heaven.

Some are here every Sunday. Now, I'm not about to call any names, because those who are truly committed, humble servants, they'd be embarrassed.

They wouldn't really think they're that kind of person. They wouldn't want to be held up. Then there's some who think they ought to be named that nobody would ever name. But there are people in this church every Sunday.

They're not perfect. No Christian has ever been perfect. We're followers of the perfect one, Jesus. But there are Christians that you know, some of you are family members who have died, they're in heaven today, and there's some in this church right now, your friends, or just somebody that you just know by coming to church here with them.

They're not perfect, but you can see they truly love the Lord. They're seeking to follow Him. They're seeking to be an obedient Christian, a faithful Christian. And when they fail, they don't pretend otherwise.

[14:22] They confess their sin, not just to God, but to other people. They let people know when they come up short. They don't try to fake it. Don't ever think that because you're not perfect, you can't be a good model for others to imitate.

When we are weak and we admit our weaknesses, our faults, our sins, that can help some Christians.

Well, they don't have it all together either. Nobody has it all together. No human being does. Don't ever think that you're not capable of being a faithful model for other people because you're not perfect.

You never will be until heaven. You can be a faithful witness, example, model. Here's what I want you to think about. Look around for committed Christians in this church or wherever else you go when you're around some mature Christians.

Look for some models. Watch them. Talk to them. Spend some time with them so that you can learn from them firsthand how to grow, how to become a more mature Christian.

[15 : 39] Spend time with them. Talk to them. Watch them. And learn from their example how committed Christians live. We need to identify faithful Christian models all around us.

But then we need to zero in on what it is that makes them good models. Look at this. We need to identify the qualities of faithful Christians that make them worthy of imitating. He says, brothers, join in imitating me and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example that you have enough things you've seen.

Look at this. The NIV translates this. Keep your eyes on those who live as we do. We've already seen several examples of how a faithful Christian lives as we've gone through this letter.

For example, I'll be real quick here. Paul exemplified how to make the best of a bad situation. You remember when we first started, I really emphasized, Paul wrote this letter to this church.

He was under house arrest in Rome. He's a prisoner. At all times, he's chained to a Roman soldier. He is awaiting trial before the emperor who could pronounce him guilty of whatever and have him executed.

[16 : 56] That's a terrible situation to be in, isn't it? But Paul made the best of it. One of the ways he did it, he's focused on other people, not himself. When Paul was under house arrest here, he couldn't go anywhere.

He was confined, but he was given the freedom to have other people come and go. And he could teach them. In this time of imprisonment, he wrote four letters to churches that are in our New Testament.

Philippians, Ephesians, Colossians, and Philemon. Instead of just sitting there having a pity party because he was falsely charged back in Jerusalem. And a long story, he's here in Rome for no reason, really.

But instead of having a pity party, feeling sorry for himself, he focused on other people. He made the best of the bad situation. Think about this. He also stayed positive by focusing on the good things that God was doing in his life.

And he gave thanks. He rejoiced in them. For example, we saw one week how Paul, he gave thanks to God because more people were hearing the gospel as a result of him being in prison there in Rome.

[18 : 11] Some of the people in Caesar's imperial guard were being exposed to the gospel because they were guarding him. And so he thanked God for that. Later on in chapter 2, at the end of chapter 2, he holds up two examples, Timothy and Epaphroditus.

He says they're also worth imitating. They're people, they're just godly men who demonstrate Christian character in just everything they do.

They are engaged in sacrificial service to God and other people. And Epaphroditus almost lost his life. He was sick at the point of death, Paul says. What I just want to say real quickly here is the New Testament provides us with many, many examples of what Christian commitment looks like in daily life.

But I want us to think about some current examples. We, in the world in which we live today, in today's culture, we need a lot more of living examples of Christian commitment here in this church, in this whole Pickens community, and even in our homes.

The New Testament scholar D.A. Carson, he challenges us, church members, provide such an example. Look at what he says. He says, if we Christians are responsible for finding suitable examples to emulate, then, of course, when we do, we shall become suitable examples whom others will emulate.

[19 : 47] Not all ministry in the church is verbal. Not all ministry is prominent. But all Christians are called upon to set a standard of talk and life that influences a new generation of converts in a godly and Christ-honoring way.

We need to be worthy examples. And in today's culture, it is urgent that we, you and me, be worthy examples.

Just think about the way we live today, where people are today. Don't we need married couples to model what a Christian marriage looks like?

Don't we need Christian couples who have children to model what a Christian home for children looks like?

You think about it. Today, and these teachers here today, if you have any doubts what I'm going to say, you just ask them after this is over. There are so many broken home situations in Pickens County.

[20 : 57] There are so many broken home situations in Pickens County. There are so many broken parents that do not grow up in a two-parent home. Some grow up with one parent or no parent.

A grandparent. An aunt and uncle. A foster home. Some grow up with two mamas or two daddies. In Pickens County today, children need, and especially Christian children and families need to see good models of home stability.

Where a husband and wife are committed to the Lord and committed to one another, and they demonstrate what it means to love one another, to serve one another, to build a life and enjoy a life together, to serve God together in the church.

People today need our example as Christians to show how to be godly parents, to love our children, to discipline our children in the right way.

Will you be that? Will you provide that kind of model, that kind of example, so that, you know, there are people in churches, maybe even in our church, there are people in churches who are Christians, who love the Lord, and they won't have a Christian marriage and home.

[22 : 22] But some of them have never been in a Christian home. They've never seen how a Christian husband and wife love each other and live together in harmony.

Because home was hell for them. They've never seen children loved and cared for and disciplined the right way in the church. So we need to provide, we need to look for those kind of examples.

If you need that, look for it. And we need to provide that to the best of our ability with God's help.

We also need to model how faithful Christians do such things as face hardships.

Life's hard for everybody. But we as Christians, with the Spirit of God within us and all the resources God makes available to us, we should be living examples of how to deal with hardships.

I'm talking about serious illness, facing death. WYFF TV Channel 4, Jeff Hart, he has just announced that he has early onset Alzheimer's.

[23 : 40] He and his family are Christians who want to be good examples of how God's people deal with such tragedy.

You can go on Channel 4's website and see a six or seven minute interview that Jeff Hart and his wife and children gave with Jane Robelow. It's edited.

Everything that he said is not in there, but it's very apparent by what is in there. He and his wife are strong Christians. And they are looking, as they say, they're looking to the Lord for the strength and the ability to deal with this and just go on with life with this.

And a lot of people in this room, you know what that's going to be. You know how hard that's going to be. They're trying to be, by opening up to this kind of interview, they're trying to be good, faithful witnesses of how Christians deal with one of the worst tragedies that human beings can experience today.

That's what we need to be. All of us in this room who are Christians. We need to be strong models who demonstrate how to live the Christian life in good times and in bad. We need to be strong Christian models for how to be content in a world that tells us we need to be everything but.

[25 : 04] We need to be models of giving of our time, our talents, and our money to God through the church, being involved in meaningful ministry, time, talent, and money.

I want you to look again at what Carson said. He says, What is your standard of talk and life at home?

What is your, in your house, your home, what is your standard, as Carson says, of talk and life?

What is your standard of talk and life at work or at school?

Or on the ball field, the golf course, the lake, wherever you are. What kind of example are you setting for others to follow? You know, just about all of us in this room, we need to ask God to help us to get serious or more serious about being consistent examples of faithful Christian commitment that other people can see and imitate.

We need to be worthy of imitating. You and I do. For the benefit of those watching us, especially younger Christians or younger people.

[26 : 31] We need to be worthy of imitating because God holds us accountable for how we live. God holds us accountable for how we influence others.

I want you to look at one thing very quickly, how Paul, Paul's final point about faithful Christians. Look at this. We can be confident that as faithful Christians, we are citizens of the kingdom of God now and will be forever.

We are at this moment, if we're Christians, we have dual citizenship. We're citizens of the kingdom of heaven. Citizens of the kingdom of God. We're part of God's family.

And we're citizens of the United States. He says our citizenship is in heaven. Now when Paul wrote that to this church, these people understood exactly the kind of point Paul was making because Philippi was a Roman colony.

And New Testament commentator Ray Robbins puts this in perspective for us. Look at this. He says, Paul chose an appropriate figure to express the truth of a Christian's dual citizenship.

[27 : 46] Philippi was a Roman colony. A Roman colony was the city of Rome transplanted into some part of the empire. The colonists lived with the pride and privileges of Roman citizenship.

Just as Roman colonists never forgot they belonged to Rome. You and I as Christians should never forget that we belong to God.

Always. We're God's people and God's citizens. Citizens of his kingdom right now. You know, what we do now matters. I don't want to go off in some kind of tangent and say, well it doesn't matter how we live, it's all going to pass away.

No, it matters how we live today and God holds us responsible for how we live today. We need to be responsible citizens of the United States. We need to be faithful where we are at any given moment.

We're called to be salt and light in this world, Jesus said. But we also need to live with awareness that nothing in this world has eternal value.

[28 : 57] Nothing that we have, that we own, that we touch, that we play with, it doesn't have eternal value. So we need to learn to make a choice every day.

Will we live according to the values of this world like fake Christians do? If we do, Paul says how it's going to end, their end is destruction.

Or, will we live according to the eternal values of God like committed Christians do? Paul encourages us strongly to live this way by telling us what we can look forward to one day.

Look at this. Jesus Christ will transform our lowly body to be like His glorious body by the power that enables Him even to subject all things to Himself. Every true Christian is going to experience that transformation one day.

It's actually going to take place at the second coming of Jesus. And Paul gives us more details about that in 1 Thessalonians chapter 4 beginning in verse 13.

[30 : 09] But here's how we need to think. If we die before the Lord returns, when we die, we immediately go to be with the Lord. We're in His presence. But we're not going to receive our final eternal body that we'll live life forever in a new heaven and new earth with.

We're not going to receive that until Jesus returns. That's what Paul says in 1 Thessalonians 4. So if we die before He comes back, when He comes back, we'll come with Him and that's when we'll get our new body.

If we're alive when Jesus comes, we won't have to die. But we will still be transformed. We still will receive our new body. You know, as I was preparing this, I thought, and I'm saying this because you can identify.

I have seen several of my Christian family members and friends whose body just absolutely wasted away before they died.

Some are members of this church. You know from what you've seen, I know from what I've seen, it's heartbreaking to see how sickness can just gradually destroy our earthly body, sometimes beyond the point of recognition.

[31 : 34] But I thought, and you need to think, when I see my parents, when I see my family members and friends who were Christians whose body wasted away, when I see them in heaven, they're going to be in the best condition they've ever been in.

You're a Christian loved ones. If you're a Christian, when you see them again, no matter what they look like at death, they're going to be in the perfect physical or whatever that new body is called condition that you will see, be able to interact with, and you and them will spend your whole eternity in the presence of the Lord.

And you'll never have another thought about what life was, what you had, what you lost in this world. If you choose to live life like people of the world, a day is coming when you're going to lose everything, including your life.

And if that happens, you die in that condition away from the Lord, you will spend eternity away from God in hell. But if you choose to live a committed Christian life, live as a committed follower of Jesus, you will have what can never be taken away from you, an eternal relationship with the Lord, an eternal relationship with God your Father, and an eternal relationship with all other Christians. Christians. So I want to ask you, what you're going to choose? If you want to be like the people of the world, be that way.

[33 : 28] But in the end, you're going to lose it all that you're trying to hold on to, and you're going to spend eternity in hell. But if you truly have been born again by the Spirit of God, and you are a faithful follower of Jesus Christ, you're going to lose anything that ever will matter.

You're just going to gain that which you will enjoy forever and ever with God and His people in heaven. So you make the choice you want to live with now and forever.

Let's pray together. Our Father, we pray right now for people in this room who are not Christians. they don't pretend to be.

Convict them. Make it clear to them their need to turn from their sin and trust Jesus as their Savior and Lord. Compel them, dear God, to call upon Jesus to save them now.

To turn from their sin. To stop running from you or fighting you. Compel them, dear God, to surrender it all to you right now.

[34 : 43] Trusting Jesus and Him alone as their Savior and Lord. Father, if there are Christians in this room that are genuinely yours, but they live more like fake Christians right now for whatever reason, they've set their sights too low.

They're focused on too many things that really do not matter or won't matter for long. They're playing a game right now.

They're not practicing what they profess. Lord, convict them. Help them to know that they'll never have the sense of peace and joy that they want as long as they're running from you or rebelling against you.

Help them, dear God, right now to just come clean with you to confess their sin, to seek, ask for your forgiveness, to make the commitment that Jesus will be Lord of all about their life.

And then, Father, we pray for faithful Christians in this room. Encourage them to keep on, to fight the good fight. Help them to know, dear God, that they are being good examples and models.

[36 : 07] They're leading people to Jesus. And Lord, help all of us.