

Becoming an Example to Follow

What Christian edition are you?

1 Thessalonians 1:7

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Disclaimer: The following are Dr. Jeff Stott's sermon notes and manuscript. They have not been carefully proofed for spelling or grammar. All Scripture quotes are from the New International Version unless noted.

Take your Bibles and open them to 1 Thessalonians 1. Today we are going to look at becoming an example to follow. There is a natural law that God created into the fiber of His creation. You see it everywhere. It's called "The Law of Example." The Law of Example says, "People learn from others intentionally or unintentionally on how to live life." Let me give you four observations from this law.

- **Number one, you don't have a choice whether this law happens to you.** This law happens to you, whether you want it to or not. It's like the law of gravity. As a child, you didn't know about the law of gravity but it was influencing you all the time. There has always been and always will be someone influencing you: the way you think, feel, react, and behave. From childhood throughout adulthood you have been and will continue to learn from the example of others. It's the "Law of Example."
- **Number two, you have a choice who you follow.** Even when it comes to God, we are reminded, "Choose you this day whom you will serve." You see this law apply early in life. Early in life you think, "I want to be like that person." So you start dressing like them, talking like them, going to places like they go, driving what they drive, and so on. That could be good or bad. As a Christian, this is also true. When you became a Christian you thought to yourself, "I need to be like that Christian," so you bought the kind of Bible they used, worshipped the way

they did, sang the kind of songs they sang in church, wore the kind of clothes they did, prayed like they prayed, and so on. That could be good or bad. But the bottom line of this is you do have a choice who you follow. It's the law of example.

- **Number three, you don't have a choice to be an example.** You are an example to others and there is always someone who is learning from you. There is a brother or sister who wants to be like you. There is a son or daughter who wants to be like you. There is a stranger at school or work who admires you and wants to be like you. There is an employee who works for you or with you who wants to be like you in some way. This law says you are an example to others whether you want to be or not. It's the law of example.
- **Number four, you have a choice of what kind of example you will be.** You can be the example of the good Christian who loves Jesus, loves God's people, who is humble, encourages others, helps others because you want to be a blessing, speak words of encouragement and hope, and to be the kind of person others like to be around. Or you can be that hard to get along with person, never smile, never laugh, be critical, judgmental, demanding, unforgiving, and is always upset about something. You have a choice of what kind of example you will be. You make this decision every day. Even today, you made a decision to come to church and worship with others. That's a good example. You have a choice of what kind of example you will be. It's the "Law of Example."

This brings us to 1 Thessalonians 1 [read 1 Thess. 1:1-7].

From verse 7 we see four truths about good Christian examples we need to seriously consider. Let's look at them.

1. Good Christian examples are needed: “model”

Number one, good Christian examples are needed. Every person, every generation needs to have those believers and those churches that are an example of how to impact a culture with the gospel of Jesus Christ. In verse 7, Paul tells the Thessalonian believers they became “a model” to other believers.

The principle explained

Some translations use the word “example” (NASB) or “pattern” (AMP) rather than “model.” This word “model” (tupos) originally referred to the mark left by a hammer leaving an impression like the original. For example, it would be like having an object with a design on it that you wanted imprinted on a piece of wood, stone, or some other material and you would use a hammer to imprint that image on the object.

Later on this word “model” simply referred to a pattern to follow, a copy to imitate, or an example to follow. So when Paul tells them they became “a model” group of believers, he was telling them the way they were living out their Christian life, doing church, and impacting the community for Christ was a pattern to follow, worthy of imitation.

The principle biblically illustrated

As a matter of fact, in 2 Corinthians 8 Paul was writing to another church in Corinth and teaching them about how to give generously and apply Biblical principles of stewardship; when he does this he uses the Thessalonian church as one of the examples for the Corinthian church to follow.

The idea of looking at other believers and other churches to see how they are living out their faith and imitating them is all through the Bible.

- 1 Timothy 4:12 says, “Don’t let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example [tupos] for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity.”¹
- Titus 2:7 says, “In everything set them an example [tupos] by doing what is good.”²
- Philippians 3:17 says, “Join with others in following my example, brothers, and take note of those who live according to the pattern [tupos] we gave you.”³

We need those believers and churches that are making an impact for Christ. You need those models to follow. You need that pattern to help guide you in living for Jesus and as a result you will be a Christian model to follow.

The principle applied

What does this mean for you and me? This means two things.

- **First, you need to have authentic Christians as your model in learning how to live out your Christian life.** Some Christians are better examples than others so choose wisely who you listen to as a believer. Find those who enjoy Jesus, excited about life, who serve others, and want to honor God and others in all they do.

¹ We need godly people who are examples and to show us how to speak like the people of God: who speak words of faith, words of encouragement, who show us how to be silent when needed, and speak words of truth in love. We need Christians who show us how to live out our love for Christ “in life.” That covers everything: marriage, death, work, parenting, becoming old, relationships, time management, health, and the list could go on and on. We need Christians and churches in our lives to show us how to live for Christ affectively and authentically in our generation.

² We need Christians who are showing us how to do what is good in everything. “Everything” covers everything. What is the good thing to do regarding my health, my finances, my emotions, my marriage, my children, my church, my home, my hobbies, and on and on. We need examples to follow and we need to be an example to follow.

³ He says, I know that living the Christian life can seem difficult and complex at times. However, take note of those who are living it right and do what they do. Those who are living the Christian life with joy, freedom, enthusiasm, and passion imitate them.

- **Secondly, you need to consider what kind of model you are becoming for others.** Everyone of you have believers who look up to you. What kind of Christianity are you modeling? What kind of example or pattern are you establishing for others to follow? The best way to find out what edition of Christianity you exemplify is to have a couple of people honestly describe what type of Christian they see you as?

2. Making an impact for Christ requires changes: “you became”

Number two, good Christian examples require change. Notice back in 1 Thessalonians 1:7 Paul says, “And so you became a model....”

The principle explained/illustrated

The word “became” means to become something they were not previously. This is the transforming power of the gospel. These raw Gentiles in Thessalonica embraced Jesus Christ as their Savior and with that He changed their lives completely. They became something they were not previously.

- According to verse 3 their faith began to produce works and deeds for God’s glory and the blessing of others. Their love for God and people prompted labor and actions on the behalf of others. Their hope in Jesus Christ caused them to endure difficulties for the sake of others. They had changed. They had become something new on the inside. Their life was now driven by faith, hope, and love.
- According to verse 6 they began to imitate other godly people like Paul, Silas, and Timothy with the ultimate goal of imitating the Lord Himself.
- According to verse 9 they changed in what they worshiped. They turned from idols to serve the living and true God.
- According to verse 10 their heart and mind was not just on the present, but also looking toward to the future when Jesus returns. They had changed. Because of this change “they became” model Christians who were worthy of imitation.

The principle applied

This is true for you as well. God wants us to be transformed and changed. Romans 12:2 says, “Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.” The more we can think with Biblical wisdom the more we are transformed and changed. God does not change, because when you are perfect why change, but He is in the transforming business of changing lives for the good. He knows that for you to experience the abundant life He wants to give you, you will need to change the way you think. Someone once said, “We don’t change the message, the message changes us.”

2 Corinthians 3:18 says, “And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into His likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.” God is using everything in your life to help bring about a transformation and change in your life in order for you to be more and more like Jesus Christ with ever increasing glory.

A good Christian example is someone who changed. They are becoming more and more like Christ. They are more and more honest, more and more loving, more and more understanding, more and more forgiving.

3. Good Christian examples affects everyone: “you...all the believers”

This brings us to number three, good Christian examples affect everyone. Look at 1 Thessalonians 1:7 again, “And so you became a model to all the believers....”

The principle explained

Making an impact for Christ affects everyone all the time. That word “you” is plural, its talking about all the believers at the church in Thessalonica. Paul just told them in verse 6 they were imitators of them, but now he tells them they are models to others. So the Thessalonian believers are in the middle of this model paradigm. They are following and imitating other believers while other believers are imitating them.

Here's the point: We are always imitating other believers but at the same time there are those learning how to live the Christian life by imitating us. Your example for Christ affects a lot of people. As you are making an impact in a believer there are other believers who are making an impact on you. Be aware of the big picture of what is going on.

The principle illustrated

Now remember, the "you" is plural. He is saying to the Thessalonian Church they have become a model, pattern, and example of what it means to be the church and to live out the Christian life as a group of believers. Paul was saying he wished the other churches in Macedonia and Achaia would examine what they were doing and imitate them on what it means to be the church.

Among many believers, there is a debate on whether a church should look at another church and learn from them. I believe its Biblical and healthy to learn from other healthy churches and imitate them. Proverbs 1:5 says, "A wise man will hear and increase in learning, and a man of understanding will acquire wise counsel" (NASB). That is true for you as an individual, but it is also true for us as a church. As a church we need to hear from other churches who represent Christ well in our culture so our learning and understanding can increase. Proverbs 11:14 says, "Where there is no guidance the people fall, but in abundance of counselors there is victory" (NASB). Proverbs 15:22 says, "Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisors they succeed." Again, that is true for you personally and that is true for us as a church body. There are times where churches have to seek advice and counsel from other churches who are doing it well.

The principle applied

This brings up two questions for us as a church body.

- **What can we learn from the 1 Thessalonian church?** This is the Biblical foundation. We are not told about their methods of ministry, but we are told about their character and motivation for ministry. For example in 1

Thessalonians 1:3 we are told they had a faith that produced work for Christ, they had a love that prompted labor for the kingdom, and they had a hope in Jesus Christ that inspired endurance in their work and labor. There are some things we should grab hold of and hang on to from the 1 Thessalonian church.

- **A second question: What can we learn from churches today that are reaching people for Christ and are helping believers become fully devoted followers of Christ?** From today's healthy churches we can see how their faith, hope, and love in Christ is being expressed in today's generation in reaching the lost and helping believers mature. This deals with the *form* or *methods* of the church. We should learn from them.

Good Christian examples affect everyone. As a church body, we are to follow the example of the 1 Thessalonian church, but we are also told to get advice and counsel from others who are doing ministry well and learn from them. The healthier we become as a church the greater the example we will be for others who are doing and wanting to do ministry as well.

4. Good Christian examples encourage others: "in Macedonia and Achaia"

Number four, good Christian examples encourage others. 1 Thessalonians 1:7 says, "And so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia."

The principle explained

The churches and believers "in Macedonia and Achaia" needed a good model to follow both in their personal life as Christians and in their cooperate life as a church. Paul had been with these churches and knew where they were struggling and having a hard time living out their Christian life in the lost world and trying to impact their world for Christ. He knew they were struggling with the balance of being in the world, but not of it. Paul knew that if the "Macedonian and Achaia" churches were to emulate the Thessalonian church, they would be stronger, encouraged, and more effective in their community for Christ.

The principle illustrated

There are many believers and churches who want to make an impact for Christ on their community. They have the right Biblical foundation, but they are not sure what it looks like to be a healthy believer or a healthy church that has penetrated into their culture with the gospel of Jesus Christ. They have the right message, but they aren't sure of the right method. God wants every church to look at healthier churches and imitate them in the ways they believe God would have them change.

There are some believers out there you could learn from on how to live the Christian life and there are some churches out there Southside could learn from on how to be the church in 2010 and beyond.

The principle applied

So what is your next step?

- For you personally, you need to look around you and find other Christians who encourage you, motivate you, and inspire you.
- Secondly, you need to look at yourself and ask, "Does my life encourage other believers? What changes can I make to be more encouraging to others?"
- Third, as a church body we need to ask ourselves, "Would we want other churches to be like us?" If not, then what needs to change and if so, what needs to remain the same?" Every church should strive to be an encouragement and a model for others in their "Macedonia and Achaia."

Conclusion

We have been talking about the "Law of Example." You and I need good Christian examples to learn from and others need for us to be good examples as well. For this to happen, we will need to change in some attitudes and behaviors in our lives. When this happens we will be a source of encouragement to other believers giving them hope and inspiration as God works through us.