

“Exampleship”

1 Thessalonians 1:1-10

Paul, Silas and Timothy,

To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ:
Grace and peace to you.

2 We always thank God for all of you and continually mention you in our prayers. 3 We remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

4 For we know, brothers and sisters loved by God, that He has chosen you, 5 because our gospel came to you not simply with words but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and deep conviction. You know how we lived among you for your sake. 6 You became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you welcomed the message in the midst of severe suffering with the joy given by the Holy Spirit. 7 And so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. 8 The Lord’s message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia—your faith in God has become known everywhere. Therefore we do not need to say anything about it, 9 for they themselves report what happened when we visited you. They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, 10 and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.

Laying his hand on the shoulder of a young monk one day, St. Francis of Assisi said, “Brother, let us go down to the town and preach.” So they went. They conversed as they went along their way. They walked down main streets, round the lowly alleys and lanes, on to the edge of the village beyond. Finally they turned back and entered the monastery again. In surprise, the youth asked, “Father, when shall we begin to preach?” St. Francis looked kindly upon the young man and said, “My child, we have been preaching: we were preaching while we were walking. We have been seen—looked at; our behavior has been noted; and so we have delivered a morning’s sermon. Ah! My son, it is of no use that we walk anywhere to preach unless we preach as we walk.”

How about I just walk around up here for the sermon next Sunday? What’s that? Somebody mumbled underneath their breath; “how about I don’t show up next Sunday?” Watching someone walk back and forth all morning would be more boring than usual wouldn’t it? Don’t answer that. What was St. Francis trying to teach his young pupil? I believe that he is basically saying, if you don’t walk your talk, your talk has no meaning. As fellow Christ-followers we are called to walk our talk. Our actions need to match up with our words. People don’t care what we know until they know we care. Verse 6 of our text in 1 Thessalonians chapter 1 reads, “And you became imitators of us.” Elsewhere in the letters that Paul wrote to the Corinthians, the Thessalonians, and the Christians in Galatia, he writes, “Become as I am. Imitate me.” Now tell the truth, doesn’t that make you feel just a little uncomfortable? Doesn’t that feel just a little arrogant? Imagine a teacher, if you will, beginning a class by saying, “This is a class in

ethics. The goal of this class will be for you to learn to imitate me.” How would you react? In my imagination I hear myself saying something like, “NAAHHT!” It seems like the height of conceit, arrogance at best. Doesn’t it? “Imitate me?” Maybe Paul needs to hear the Chinese saying that goes, “Your ship of success won’t capsize if your head always maintains the same cap ... size.” So we value humility. The Bible tells us that God works against the proud but lifts up the humble. [NOTE 1]

Nowadays, what we expect to hear from “good” teachers is more like, “Class, I’m going to lay out a few principles for you, a few interesting ideas (though they are not my own), some insights for discussion and then I want you to make up your own mind. You see, I respect your identity, your ideas, your individuality. I don’t want to force myself on you. I’m not like Paul.” That’s what they say. And it sounds good doesn’t it? It sounds appropriately self-effacing, modest, respectful. It sounds good. The key word being “sounds.” What it is really saying in effect is: “I want to get through this class without taking any responsibility for any life but my own.”

The reason it sounds good on the surface is that it fits our society and what our society values. Tolerance, above all! (except when it comes to Christianity it seems lately). All this is to highlight the fact that Paul’s audience was very different than ours in some ways. Our society is based on the Constitution, which created something called the individual, someone who carries around within him or herself a bundle of individual rights, individual opinions, individual claims. The concept of the individual is basically new to world history. Unfortunately, the individualistic society, can be very lonely and it discourages true community. If you read it carefully, there are a lot of ways that the Bible is “Anti-individual.” We read much in the New Testament about unity, loving one another, serving one another, and acting as one. Very little if any about the “individual.” [NOTE 2]

In Paul’s day the moral and teaching tradition assumed a relationship between teacher and pupil which asserted that the purpose of learning was imitation of the master. Their tradition assumed that teachers had a responsibility to live as they taught, to walk as they spoke, and it was assumed pupils would endeavor not only to know what was being taught but also to live it out. That is one of the most difficult thing about making disciples: leading an “immitatable” life. But what is great about it is that it forces us to depend on Christ in us, by the power of the Holy Spirit. That fights against pride. Our society, on the other hand teaches us to learn it just well enough to regurgitate it on a test and then we can forget all about it. Discipleship is about making something stick. Discipleship changes you, it produces fruit.

That is why Paul is so pleased with what has happened at Thessalonica since he was there last. The Christians in Thessalonica had become imitators of Paul and of the Lord. Furthermore, in their courage, in their boldness in the face of persecution, they had “become an example” to others! It says that the Thessalonian Christians were examples to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia.” The world is better because of their example. That is what God is calling Voice of Hope Church to become. An example! God willing, a good example! There is no way to weasel out of the truth that

discipleship is still utterly dependent on our being able to identify examples, saints, people worthy of imitation. **[NOTE 3]** If we can't point to examples, even to ourselves, we really have very little to say. Our world is not off base in judging Christianity by the sort of lives that are produced by it. Our ministry, our effectiveness, should be measured by love, care, and producing the fruit of the Spirit: Love, joy, peace patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. That is why hypocrites, egomaniacs, and fraud's are so damaging to the Christian witness. If we lack changed lives, we pervert the gospel into some intellectual dilemma, some head trip instead of what it really is: a lifestyle change.

Think over your own life as a Christian. I doubt that there are many of us who are here because we read about being a Christian in a book or because we took a seminar or watched a webinar on Christianity. We are here because we were attracted by the lives of others. We became Christian because we saw faith practiced and we wanted to follow someone's example. **[NOTE 4]**

In a sermon on Esau's meeting with Jacob in Genesis chapter 33, Jacob says, "I saw your face and you looked like God." Charles E. Poole says: "Have you ever known anyone who really looked like God? Is there anyone in your life who looks kind of like God to you? Now some of you are immediately going to, "you can't look like God because God is Spirit." Okay, try not to be so literal. Broaden your thinking to what God's character, imitating Jesus, would look like? The people who look like God are the people who understand us, believe in us, bless us but do not curse us, hug us like Esau, love us like God, and make us want to be better ...they are with us for God and they keep us on our feet.

Is there anybody in your life like that? Who believes in you and makes you want to be better? And what about each of you? Is there anybody for whom your face looks a little like God? If you have ever gotten your eyes off of yourself, gotten yourself off your hands, and put your life in God's hands, then you have probably given someone reason to say you looked a little like God to them. Somewhere, somehow, sometime ... if you are spending your life, investing your life, giving yourself away, then to somebody out there, you look a little like God.

Somebody just got back from the funeral home, or from saying goodbye at an airport, or from a long trip. You had cleaned their home, cut the grass, and straightened up before all the out-of-town family started coming in. For a minute there, you looked like God. They had just gotten her home from surgery and got her into bed, when they heard the doorbell. You were standing there at the door with a casserole, some biscuits and a pie ... When they got to the door and saw you, for a minute there, you looked like God, juggling your Pyrex, Tupperware and plasticware. Oh don't worry, they know God doesn't look like you physically. No one is going to worship you or confuse you with God. You are not holy, with a life, fully separated out for God. It is just that sometimes, you are a little like God. When you are with people, when you are just there for them, when you greet a person with the embrace of unexpected acceptance and unearned affection, when you listen, listen to them and hold them up in prayer and befriend them,

then when they look at your face, it looks a little like God's." They see a little of God's love, His peace, His unconditional acceptance, mercy and grace ... in you! **[NOTE 5]**

Tomorrow, as you go about your daily tasks, in the office, (at the kitchen sink), in the classroom, garage, shop, or the yard, people will be looking at you, rightly trying to see God reflected somehow, somewhere in your life. What will they see? Will they see any trace of God reflected in you? Like it or not ... you are an example. People are watching you if you claim to be a Christian to see if your life is any different than the Muslim down the street or the JW a mile down the road. Charles Barkley balked when people told him he needed to watch how he acted and talked because children were looking up to him, he said something to the effect that he never asked to be an example. People of God, you don't have to ask or even desire in any way, shape, or form, to be an example. But if you claim to be a Christian, you are an example. You are a role model to some non-Christian of what a Christian looks like. May God give us the grace and the courage to be good examples. Now this is where I got the title for this message. I put together Discipleship and being an example. May God give us what we need to practice exampleship. Exampleship does NOT take the place of discipleship. Discipleship is that intentional one on one relationship wherein we try to grow closer to being more like Jesus. (Say More Like Jesus!) Exampleship is the day-to-day witness that Doster Community Church has as the world watches the church; an example to the community and to individuals. (Say example to the community) We need to imitate Paul and the one Great example, Jesus Christ. The word example means image, model, or pattern to follow. If we truly focus our lives first and foremost on living Christ-like lives then, through the grace of God, we can and should be a model or pattern for those around us to follow as well. As we imitate Christ we become good examples to those who would be become disciples, Christ-followers themselves.

If you practice exampleship, God will bless you. God performs His works on earth: Jesus and His ambassadors give an example of rejoicing even amid suffering and the Holy Spirit imparts joy. Then people who are watching come to believe and welcome the Word and become themselves imitators of God and carry the good news to others whose praises glorify God.

Now, being an example to the world sounds just a little bit intimidating, doesn't it? As we look at our lives and all our failings, there is no way that we want everyone to follow our examples or imitate us. That is where the saying, "Do what I say, not what I do," comes from. We know our faults, failings, sins, etc. But there is no way out! Whether we ask for it or not, we are examples to the world. "God has chosen you," Paul says in verse 4. God has chosen us to be Jesus with skin on to the people we come in contact with. Remember that Jesus loves you and never asks you to do something without providing the resources to accomplish it.

(So decide to join a Life group or Start one! Join one of the Teams listed in the bulletin or ask one of the Consistory members or myself to start a Discipleship Group of 3-5 people) You don't have to buy a book and go through it, Use your Bible and go through it or go in the Library and Open the Right Now Media app and there are tons of

resources! Get involved, as we help one another to grow toward being better examples. Let's pray for the Holy Spirit to make us better witnesses and let's be Christ-followers who develop other Christ-followers and turn the Doster community upside down for Jesus. (Read the back of the bulletin) ...Remember that you are always being an example to somebody. Make your life ... a good example by serving Jesus Christ and doing all you can to become more like Him every day. Practice exampleship and discipleship, two different things. As you follow Christ, you are an example to others pointing to Christ. But you are just practicing exampleship until you develop a personal relationship with that person and walk with them, teach them all that Jesus commanded and teach them to listen to the Holy Spirit, to pray, to follow Jesus and do the things that He did. Then you are discipling them.

Let's pray ...Eternal and loving God, we confess that none of us is here because we deserve to be. None of us is worthy to be an example to Your children. But You choose us anyway. Thank You that even though we are not worthy, You count us as Your children. Help us to live like we are Your children. For your grace in calling us to be Your people, for Your love revealed to us in the lives of others and in the work of Christ Your Son, we give You thanks, O God. For those visionary and courageous people who founded this church and planned, worked, and sacrificed before us; for the leaders, teachers, and friends who led us toward You and encouraged us to make You our Lord and Savior, we Thank You and praise You! Lord, we are not here solely through our own efforts. You have provided for us what we needed: examples, people worthy of imitation, brothers and sisters who showed us the way. Since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, so many worthy examples whom we are bound to imitate, strengthen us to run with perseverance the race of life that is set before us. May we focus our minds and our hearts, and our very lives on Jesus the ultimate example and the Pioneer and perfecter of our faith. May we so live that people are pointed toward You when they see our examples. May people see You reflected in us we ask in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord and our Savior ...AMEN.

Sermon Notes for “Exampleship” based on 1Thessalonians 1: 1-10
Given on August 23, 2026 at Doster Community Church

- I. Doesn't Paul's phrase, "Imitate me" seem kind of arrogant? It only sounds arrogant to a society based on individualism.
- II. What is an individual? The Bible is "anti-individual" in many ways. The Bible calls us to unity, acting as one, service, putting others ahead of ourselves, loving God and loving our neighbor.
- III. The Thessalonian Christians had become good "examples" to the others that lived around them.
- IV. Are we good examples? Are there times when you look a little like God to others? Strive so to imitate Jesus that you are a good example.
- V. Exampleship is not the same as Discipleship. Exampleship creates in others the desire to know Jesus. Discipleship develops people who know Him into fully devoted followers of Jesus Christ.