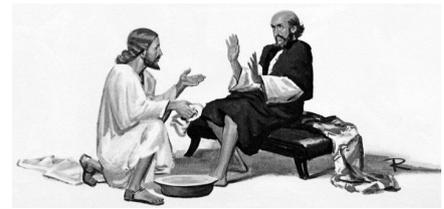


EXAMPLES WORTH FOLLOWING

Introduction

“Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you, whose faith follow [imitate], considering the outcome of their conduct” (Hebrews 13:7).

“Let no one despise your youth, but be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity” (1 Timothy 4:12).



1. From birth to the present day we are influenced by the examples others. The kind of people to whom we look as examples will be determined largely by our desires. If we are worldly minded, then those in the world will be our examples and influence our thoughts and attitudes, but if we are spiritually minded, then we’ll look to the scriptures for godly men and women as our examples.
2. The Bible speaks of imitating those who are good examples (1 Corinthians 11:1; Philippians 3:17; Hebrews 13:7) and being a good example to others (1 Timothy 4:12).
3. In this lesson we shall consider three questions:
 - a. Whose example am I following?
 - b. To whom am I an example?
 - c. Am I a good example for others to imitate?

I. Whose Example Am I Following?

Jesus, of course, is the ultimate example for every Christian, but we are also exhorted to follow the good examples of godly men and women.

1. Following the example of Jesus:

- a. Instances where Scripture specifically refers to Jesus as our example:

“Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus... taking the form of a bondservant... and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross” (Philippians 2:5-8).

- 1) His example in servanthood: after Jesus washed the disciples’ feet, He said, “For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you” (John 13:15).

Jesus, despite knowing that His disciples would desert Him (Mark 14:27), and that Peter would deny Him three times (Luke 22:34), and that Judas would betray Him (John 6:64), still washed their feet (John 13:1-15). We must follow Jesus’ example (John 13:15), and this means not judging beforehand whether a person is worthy of serving.

- 2) His example in suffering: “For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps” (1 Peter 2:21).

Following Jesus’ example is not always glamorous or easy but these are two aspects that highlighted Jesus’ life. Are we willing to follow His example in laying aside our sense of entitlement and perhaps even in laying aside our very lives?



Paul refers to these same qualities in Jesus as a *mindset* that Christians are to adopt.

“Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross” (Philippians 2:5-8).

Following Jesus’ example, then, involves our inward being, not just our outward actions. Are we willing to let His example affect us to the core of our being?

b. Instances where we are exhorted to be like Jesus:

“Whoever claims to live in Him must live as Jesus did” (1 John 2:6).

- 1) Both Paul and John exhort us to love as Jesus loved, and this even means laying down our lives for the brethren (Ephesians 5:1-2; 1 John 3:15-16).
- 2) Paul exhorts us to be ready to forgive one another just as Christ forgave us (Colossians 3:13).

Following Jesus’ example affects our relationships with others. Are we willing to be selfless as He was?

c. Other instances in which we can follow Jesus’ example not specifically referenced that way in Scripture. While there are only two verses that specifically suggest areas in which Jesus is our example (John 13:15; 1 Peter 2:21), we do find Scriptures about God’s intent for us to be “conformed to the image of His Son” (Romans 8:29). To be Christ-like, we must follow His example in all areas of life:

- 1) Jesus’ example in communicating: Jesus communicated with authority: “And so it was, when Jesus had ended these sayings, that the people were astonished at His teaching” (Matthew 7:28). Paul exhorted Titus, “Speak these things, exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no one despise you” (Titus 2:15).
- 2) Jesus’ example of awareness: Jesus was often aware of people’s actions and needs before they approached Him. (i) Jesus was aware of a widow’s needs and her great sacrifice (Mark 12:41-44), (ii) Jesus often knew people’s thoughts and took the opportunity to teach (Matthew 12:22-32; Luke 6:6-11). True, we cannot know the thoughts of people as Jesus did, but we can often make a very good guess based on a person’s expressions and body language. For example, a look of puzzlement reveals the need for clarification.
- 3) Jesus’ example in dealing with enemies: Jesus attitude towards His enemies is reflected in His teaching: “But I say to you who hear: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, and pray for those who spitefully use you” (Luke 6:27-28); in His behavior: He washed the feet of Judas (John 13:1-15); in His concern for them (Luke 19:41-44); in His intercession for them (Luke 23:33-34).
- 4) Jesus’ example in prayer: Jesus often withdrew to the wilderness to pray (Luke 5:16). He prayed all night (despite the fact He had to work the next day!) (Luke 6:12; cp. Mark 6:46; 14:23). Thus He taught men to pray and practiced what He preached (Luke 18:1-8).

2. Following the example of Paul:

a. Paul often urged brethren to follow his example, but only so far as he imitated Christ: “Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ” (1 Corinthians 11:1).

“Therefore I urge you, imitate me” (1 Corinthians 4:16).

“Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern” (Philippians 3:17).

“The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you” (Philippians 4:9).

“For you yourselves know how you ought to follow us, for we were not disorderly among you; nor did we eat anyone’s bread free of charge, but worked with labor and toil night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, not because we do not have authority, but to make ourselves an example of how you should follow us” (2 Thessalonians 3:7-9).

b. Here are some ways in which Paul is an example:

1) Paul sought to become all things to all men to bring many to salvation.

“For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win the more; and to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those who are under the law, as under the law, that I might win those who are under the law; to those who are without law, as without law (not being without law toward God, but under law toward Christ), that I might win those who are without law; to the weak I became as weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some” (1 Corinthians 9:19-22).

“Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. Give no offense, either to the Jews or to the Greeks or to the church of God, just as I also please all men in all things, not seeking my own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved” (1 Corinthians 10:31-33).

2) Paul worked with his own hands.

“But we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition which he received from us. For you yourselves know how you ought to follow us, for we were not disorderly among you; nor did we eat anyone's bread free of charge, but worked with labor and toil night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, not because we do not have authority, but to make ourselves an example of how you should follow us. For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat” (2 Thessalonians 3:6-10).

“And we (apostles) labor, working with our own hands. Being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we endure” (1 Corinthians 4:12).

3) Paul kept on keeping on despite persecution and discouragement:

“Are they ministers of Christ?—I speak as a fool—I am more: in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths often. From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness- besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches. Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to stumble, and I do not burn with indignation? If I must boast, I will boast in the things which concern my infirmity” (2 Corinthians 11:23-30).

“Yet indeed I also count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is from God by faith; that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, if, by any means, I may attain to the resurrection from the dead” (Philippians 3:8-11).

c. As you study the book of Acts, you will find many examples of Paul's behavior that aligns with his teaching in his epistles. Paul was no hypocrite – he practiced what he taught to an extreme (cp. 1 Corinthians 15:9-10).

3. Following the example of faithful brethren:

a. The scriptures exhort us to imitate the good example of faithful brethren:

“Beloved, do not imitate what is evil, but what is good. He who does good is of God, but he who does evil has not seen God” (3 John 1:11).

“Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern” (Philippians 3:17).

“And we desire that each one of you show the same diligence to the full assurance of hope until the end, that you do not become sluggish, but imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises” (Hebrews 6:11-12).

b. Here are a few examples of godly men and women to follow:

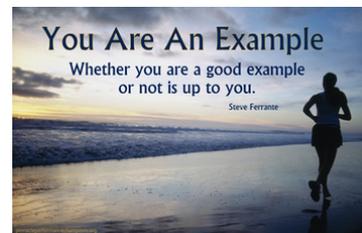
- 1) Tabitha: Luke says she was “full of good works and charitable deeds” (Acts 9:36). One of her good works was in making tunics and garments for people (Acts 9:39). Do people recognize you as someone full of good works and charitable deeds?
- 2) Epaphroditus: Paul said that he was to be honored and highly appreciated “because for the work of Christ he came close to death, not regarding his life, to supply what was lacking in your service toward me” (Philippians 2:25-30). Are you working zealously in the kingdom of God? Would you gladly lay down your life in God’s service?
- 3) Lydia & Gaius: **Lydia**. After hearing and obeying the gospel, she insisted that Paul and his companions stayed at her house. Luke then records how Paul cast a demon out of a slave girl and how they were subsequently arrested, beaten and thrown into jail. This led to the conversion of the Philippian jailer. After their release from prison, they once again stayed at the house of Lydia (Acts 16:11-40). In describing Lydia’s invitation, Luke says she “constrained” us. The word “constrained” means “to force. To press, compel, coerce, persuade” (CWSD). Gill comments, “She not only invited them, but obliged them to go with her; she would take no denial, and by her arguments, entreaties, and importunity, as it were forced them, and prevailed upon them to go with her” (Gill). **Gaius**. He was known for his hospitality toward preachers (3 John 1:5-8). Are you known for your hospitality?¹
- 4) Barnabas: The apostles had quickly come to notice something exceptional about Joses – he was a great encourager; so much so that they called him Barnabas² (Acts 4:36-37; see 11:22-23). To what degree do you encourage others? Explain!

II. To Whom Am I An Example?

Whenever we are in the presence of others, we are exerting an influence and setting an example – whether good or bad. Our aim, of course, is to always set a good example.

1. There are some people that actually think that setting a good example is noticed, but that setting a bad example goes unnoticed. Strange! But, of course, others are watching us all the time and – whether for good or bad – we are setting an example.
2. There are basically three groups of people before whom we set an example:
 - a. Christians:

- 1) We ought to be an example to our brethren “... in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity” (1 Timothy 4:12).



“You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden... Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven” (Matthew 5:14, 16).

¹ True, it may not be possible for some to put up brethren, but let’s examine our hearts: even if you could put up brethren, do you want to?

² As it explains in the text, “Barnabas” means “son of encouragement”.

- 2) There are grave consequences for setting a bad example to our brethren: some brethren in Corinth knew that an idol was nothing and that meat offered to idols and sold in the market place was not contaminated and, therefore, perfectly okay to eat. But some brethren could not eat such meat because it bothered their consciences. So speaking to the former brethren, Paul warns, “But beware lest somehow this liberty of yours become a stumbling block to those who are weak. For if anyone sees you who have knowledge eating in an idol’s temple, will not the conscience of him who is weak be emboldened to eat those things offered to idols? And because of your knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died? But when you thus sin against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ. Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never again eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble” (1 Corinthians 8:9-13).

b. Unbelievers:

“Walk in wisdom toward those who are outside, redeeming the time” (Colossians 4:5).

- 1) A godly wife ought to set a good example to her unbelieving husband (1 Peter 3:1-2; cp. 1 Corinthians 7:10-16).
- 2) A Christian’s good example may win unbelievers: “Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God should they one day obey the gospel” (1 Peter 2:12 ^{Paraphrase}).
- 3) An unbeliever can be influenced by the example of the congregation: “Therefore if the whole church comes together in one place, and all speak with tongues, and there come in those who are uninformed or unbelievers, will they not say that you are out of your mind? But if all prophesy, and an unbeliever or an uninformed person comes in, he is convinced by all, he is convicted by all. And thus the secrets of his heart are revealed; and so, falling down on his face, he will worship God and report that God is truly among you” (1 Corinthians 14:23-25).

c. Children: I found many verses about teaching and disciplining children (Proverbs 13:24; 22:6; Ephesians 6:4; Colossians 3:21, etc.), but none that specifically talk about leading by example. However, we all know from experience that children imitate their parents, and this fact ought to prompt us to lead and teach by example.

III. Am I A Good Example For Others To Imitate?

Whether we are a good or bad example to others is going to be determined by how closely we are following the example of the Lord.

- 1. Judgment begins at home. In ruling one’s household it is obvious that setting a good example to everyone in the household is essential.

“For I have known him, in order that he may command his children and his household after him, that they keep the way of Yahweh, to do righteousness and justice, that Yahweh may bring to Abraham what He has spoken to him” (Genesis 18:19).

“Train up a child in the way he should go, And when he is old he will not depart from it” (Proverbs 22:6).

“One who rules his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence (for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?)” (1 Timothy 3:4-5)³.



“Are you a good or bad example to those in your household? How your children have turned out is a clue! (Proverbs 22:6)” (David Collins).

- 2. Whether or not we are setting a good example to those outside comes down to a matter of introspection. You yourself have to honestly determine that question by considering you speech and behavior in their presence. Are you an example of graceful speech free of foulness, lewdness, and innuendo (Colossians 4:5-6)? Is your conduct honorable (1 Peter 2:11-12)? A Christian must be a light to the world:

³ It is erroneously thought by some that only one aspiring to be an Elder need rule his own house well. This, of course, is ridiculous; all men ought to strive to do so.

“You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lamp-stand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven” (Matthew 5:14-16).

“Do all things without complaining and disputing, that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world, holding fast the word of life, so that I may rejoice in the day of Christ that I have not run in vain or labored in vain” (Philippians 2:14-16).

“You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness” (1 Thessalonians 5:5).

3. Are we a good example to the brethren?

a. If brethren followed your example would they...

- Attend services every Sunday and Wednesday night (Acts 20:7; Hebrews 10:25)?
- Share the gospel with their neighbors (Acts 8:4)?
- Be watching things on television that contained blasphemy, foul language, nudity, violence, etc (Psalms 101:3; 119:37; 1 Thessalonians 5:22)?
- Wear modest clothing (1 Timothy 2:9)?
- Have their children greet brethren and show proper respect and honor (Leviticus 19:32; Romans 13:7)?
- Pray without ceasing (1 Thessalonians 5:17)?
- Devote themselves to studying the scriptures (Psalms 119:82; 1 Peter 2:1-3)?
- Stir their brethren unto love and good works (Hebrews 10:24)?
- Be zealous for good works (Ephesians 2:10; Titus 3:8)?

b. The above are just a few examples, but you get the point. What kind of Christians would everyone be if they followed your example?

c. A few other things to consider:

1) Is your example...

- Indicative of a faithful Christian: showing the world what it means to be a Christian? Showing babes in Christ what maturity means as a disciple?

Is your example helping or hindering discipleship in others?

- Conducive to church growth: offering a noble pattern of faithful church attendance? Setting a good example of developing one's abilities for Christ? Providing a worthy model of involvement in service to the Lord and His Church?

Is your example helping or hindering the progress of the church?

- Worthy of emulation: would you want a child or new Christian to follow your example?

2) If every member provided the same example as you...

- Would the church be strong?
- Would the church be growing?

Is your example helping or hindering the cause of Christ?

Conclusion

1. Everyone is following an example and everyone is setting an example. The questions we must ask are...
 - a. Whose example am I following?
 - b. To whom am I an example?
 - c. Am I a good example for others to imitate?
2. Jesus, of course, is the ultimate example we ought to follow in all things. We can also look to other godly men and women as examples to follow, but only in as much as they are imitating Christ.
3. As Christians, we are always setting an example before others: Brethren, unbelievers, and children. So we must ensure we are setting a good example at all times. People are always listening and watching.
4. What kind of example are you to others? Now that's a question that requires some extremely honest introspection! Have your children followed your example? Do unbelievers respect you? Would it be a good thing if all the brethren were just like you?
5. Paul's words to Timothy are applicable to every Christian:

"... be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity" (1 Timothy 4:12).

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This sermon is based on an outline *by* Mark A. Copeland.