1 Corinthians 11:1; 1 Timothy4:12 *Disciples who Make Disciples*: *Live a Life Worthy of Being Followed*

***A Sub-Contracted Illustration***The sermon today is about living a life worthy of being followed. We’re in a series called Disciples who Make Disciples. For the last 4 weeks we have been talking about discipleship, following Jesus, and also being people who are role models and mentors for each other.

Usually, I like to start my sermon with a personal story or illustration to kind of get us into the topic. But I couldn’t think of any stories from my life that really fit. So this week, I’ve sub-contracted the opening illustration. I asked Jay to share a story from his life:

**<<show Jay’s video>>**

We need to be careful about who we are following. Last week, we looked at Paul’s advice to the Philippians to “keep your eyes on those who live as we do.” We talked about the need to have Godly examples. We talked about the people who we should emulate: those who look out for the welfare of others, those who risk for the sake of Christ, those who put Christ above all else, those who know they still have more to learn, and those who live as citizens of heaven.

But there’s a flip side to that as well. Not only do we need to find good people to imitate, we need to be people who are worthy of imitation. Think about those two vans that were following Jay. He didn’t mean to, but he led them astray. We need to ask ourselves, “If someone is following me, am I leading them in the right way?”

Let’s look at the other verse I mentioned last week, **1 Corinthians 11:1.** The Apostle Paul writes:

**1**Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.

Paul gives a big invitation here. He is inviting the Corinthians and everyone else who reads this letter—including us—to look at his life and imitate it. Think of that. He is pretty much putting his life on display. He’s saying that he wants people to watch him, to learn from him, hold him up as an example.

This is like a life guard giving swimming lessons to a bunch of five-year-olds. The life guard wants to teach the American crawl, so she says: “Watch me. Do what I do.” But instead of teaching proper breathing patterns or how to do a flutter kick, Paul is teaching how to live a Christian life. He says, “Watch me. Do what I do.”

And the reason he is comfortable saying that, the reason he is willing to subject his life to such scrutiny, is because he is following Christ. That’s the key. Paul is a good example because he is using Jesus as his example. So if you live the way Paul does, you should be living the way Jesus would. Paul’s example is worth following only as it mirrors the example set by Christ.

So, the question is, would you and I be comfortable saying something like this? Would we be comfortable going to someone and saying: “Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ”? Are we living lives worthy of being followed? If someone is following our taillights, are they going to end up in the right place?

***Advice to Timothy***This isn’t the only place in scripture where Paul talks about setting an example. In fact, it is a theme he comes back to quite often. Christ is the leader. Paul is following Christ. Others should follow Paul. And those who follow Paul should be worthy of being followed as well.

Consider Timothy. We mentioned Timothy last week as someone worthy of imitation. He was a frequent traveling companion of Paul and one of Paul’s most trusted friends. Eventually Timothy became the leader of the church in Ephesus, and the books of the Bible we know as 1 and 2 Timothy are letters of advice from Paul to Timothy to help him pastor the church. These letters remind Timothy often to pay attention to the example he is setting for others.

Let’s look at**1 Timothy 4:12-16:**

**12**Don’t let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith and in purity. **13**Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching. **14**Do not neglect your gift, which was given you through prophecy when the body of elders laid their hands on you.

**15**Be diligent in these matters; give yourself wholly to them, so that everyone may see your progress. **16**Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers.

Paul says to Timothy: “set an example.” Your life, Timothy, is being watched. The other believers are looking at you, following you, learning what it means to believe in Jesus by observing you. So, embrace it, Timothy. Pay attention to your life and doctrine. Be a role model. Give yourself to living as an example of what it means to follow Jesus, and in so doing you will save both yourself and those who are watching you.

And the advice Paul gives to Timothy is a good advice for all of us. We need to ask, are we setting a good example? Would it be helpful for other believers to live the way we do? Are we living lives worthy of being followed?

***Youth***We’re going to focus in on **verse 12 today,** and the five areas that Paul mentions as areas to set an example: in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, and in purity.

But before we get into that, I need to say a little bit about how the verse starts: “Don’t let anyone look down on you because you are young.” I’ve always assumed that when Paul wrote this Timothy was in his early 20s. I assumed that he was essentially college-aged when he travelled with Paul, and then it was like he was just out of school as he began serving as pastor.

We had a classis meeting this last Tuesday. That’s a gathering of all the Reformed Churches in our district, which we call a classis. And in the last couple of years we’ve added several pastors to our classis who are serving their first church, right out of seminary. You know: good looking guys, in their 20s, fit and trim. And as I was standing next to Terry Hill, waiting to go through the supper line, I said to Terry: “I’m not a young pastor anymore.” For so many years, I was one of the youngest ones at a classis meeting, and now I’m one of the veterans. I always thought this verse applied to me, like Paul was saying to me: “Don’t let anyone look down on you because you are young.” But on Tuesday, I kind of decided, that’s not me anymore.

And Terry kind of commiserated with me. He didn’t say: “Oh no, Russell, you’re still a kid!” Instead, he said that’s one of the signs of age: when you walk into a church for the first time and realize that the pastor—a position which for most of your life was filled by someone older than you—is younger than you. The same thing happens with doctors and politicians. When they start getting younger, you know you are getting older.

So, anyway, I was shocked this week to find out how old Timothy probably was when Paul wrote this. According to Wikipedia—not always the best source, I know—the best guess as to Timothy’s year of birth is AD 17. That means Timothy would have been about 13 when Jesus died on the cross. It also means he would have been about 31 when Paul visited his hometown of Lystra for the first time. That’s when he probably became a Christian. It wasn’t until the year 52—when Timothy would have been 35—that Paul came around on his second missionary journey and Timothy began travelling with him. Timothy then spent more than a decade travelling with Paul. And so, the scholars’ best guess as to when Timothy became the pastor in Ephesus is the year 64, which means if their guess as to the year of his birth is accurate, he would have been 47 when this letter was written!

And yet, Paul still calls him young. Which is encouraging to me, since I’m 45. So I’ve still got a couple of years left to be the young pastor.

Actually, I read this week that in that culture forty was commonly considered the age of maturity. It was just assumed that you hadn’t really figured life out until you were 40, and those who were older were not inclined to think well of anyone who was younger. Older folks were not likely to consider younger folks as being worthwhile examples to follow.

And Paul gets this. He knows that there are going to be people in this church who might still write Timothy off as a know-nothing young whippersnapper. But his advice is to lead by example. The way to overcome the doubts is to watch his life and doctrine closely. He can demonstrate what it means to live for Jesus by being someone worthy of following.

What I take away from this is that age doesn’t matter. What Paul is saying is that even if you are young, you can be an example to others. If you are 14 or 15 or 16, you can model what it means to follow Jesus. And if you are older, 44 or 54 or 64, you can set an example as well. Age is not an excuse.

So, even if you do not consider yourself young anymore, don’t assume this verse is not for you. Paul is calling all of us to pay attention to the example we are setting for others.

So now, let’s look at the five areas where we are to be an example to one another. I’m following a series of blog posts by Tim Challies here (<https://www.challies.com/series/set-an-example/>)

***Tame Your Tongue***First, we are to **set an example in our speech.** Watch your words.

A couple of winters ago we did a series on the power of our words. We saw that the book of Proverbs, as well as the third chapter of James and Ephesians 4 and 5 have a lot to say about the way we speak to one another. Jesus said in Luke 6:45: “Out of the abundance of the heart [the] mouth speaks.” Our words reveal who we are, deep inside.

Words can build us up. Words can tear us down.

And so, Paul encourages Timothy to watch his words. Timothy can be an example to the believers in the way he tames his tongue. As a preacher and leader, Timothy will be speaking a lot of words and every one of them will have the power to prove him an example to follow or a disaster to be avoided.

If we are going to be people who are worthy of following, then we need to watch our words. We need to get rid of worldly patterns of speech: things like profanity and dishonesty and gossip and grumbling and slander and abusive speech. Instead, we need to use words that speak life, words that are encouraging and true and thankful and full of forgiveness. We need to choose words that build others up rather than tear them down.

Timothy’s challenge was to put to death all those old ways of speaking and to bring to life all those new ways of speaking. He was to ensure that every word that came out of his mouth was good, true, and exemplary. His ministry, his credibility, his usefulness to God depended on it.

And Timothy’s challenge is our challenge. And, of course, this isn’t just talking about how you talk when face to face with someone; but would also include the words you type on your computer, the things you might include in a Snapchat or Facebook post or Instagram message. All our communication is setting an example, every one of our words matter.

***Watch Your Life***Or, second: Paul says that we should **set an example in our conduct.** Watch your life.

We all know that as Christians we are supposed to live as examples in the way we behave. Just like older siblings are told to be good examples for their younger brothers and sisters, we’ve been told that the world is watching our actions. As the old saying goes, our lives are constantly preaching a sermon.

So when we are at school and work, when we’re interacting with neighbors and customers, even when we’re at a family reunion, we are told to behave in distinctly Christian ways, because we never know who might be watching us. We are supposed to be salt and light. Our lives might be the only sermons some nonChristians ever hear.

But it’s not just the unbelievers that we are serving as examples for. Paul says that we are to set an example for the believers. Other Christians, even those older or more experienced then us, are invited to watch our lives and learn from them.

All the time, in every way, in all of life, God is challenging us to be examples of godliness to one another.

The word translated “conduct” here is a very general word. It’s a broad word that refers to all of life. In all he does, in all his behavior, Timothy is to set an example. In every realm of life he is to be exemplary. There is no area of life that isn’t covered by “set the believers an example in conduct.”

This was true for Timothy and it is true of all of us. We aren’t exempted from serving as an example of Christian conduct simply because we are doing non-church things.. We are to be an example “at home, at church, at the grocery store, on the freeway, on the playground, at the barber shop” (according to Philip Ryken). Kent Hughes says, “In the day-in, day-out humdrum of existence—at the gas station, in the grocery line, at the soccer game, washing the car—[you] must be an example to all who believe.”

All the time, in every way, in all of life, God challenges us to be examples of godliness to other Christians.

***Agape***Third, if we want to live a life that is worthy of being followed, then **set an example in our love**. Watch the affection you have for others.

The word Paul uses here is *agape.* If you’ve been around churches for awhile, you have probably heard that the Greek New Testament has four words for expressing love. One is *philieos* which is brotherly love. Another is *storge* which is affectionate love, like that of a mother for a child. A third is *eros*, which is romantic love. But the fourth one, *agape*, is the big one. It’s the unconditional love that God has for us. It’s a gift love, love that is given for no other reason than the generosity of the one doing the loving. It is big-hearted love.

And the word Paul uses here, again, is *agape*. Timothy is supposed to set an example by showing generous, big hearted, unconditional love. Timothy is to set an example for the believers by loving all the believers, even the ones who are hard to love. Not just for what they can do for him. Not just for what he can get out of it. But because he wants to love like Jesus loves.

We need to remember that, according to the Bible, love is not just a feeling or emotion but something that works itself out in action. Love is not less than what we feel, but it is certainly more. Aren’t you glad that Jesus did not only feel love for you but that he ultimately acted in love for you? His feelings would not have done us much good! The ultimate measure of love is not what we feel for others but what we do for them. Paul’s concern is not just that Timothy feel love for others, but that he acts in loving ways.

And the truth is: people can be hard to love! Loving others is the kind of challenge that tests the best of us. It is a challenge because of sin—*we* are sinful and *they* are sinful, and there is always trouble when sin meets sin.

Yet loving the hard-to-love is one of the ways we demonstrate our obedience to God. It is how we display Christ-like humility. Ultimately, according to 1 John 3:14 it is how we give evidence of our salvation.

The love we extend to others is the very same love God has extended to us through Christ.

Young Timothy was to be an example of Christian love, love he felt internally and love he acted externally. The special setting for his love was his local church, for it was there that he was to set an example before other believers.

Timothy’s challenge has become our challenge. We, too, are called to love. We are called to love the people in our local church and to serve as a model of what it means to love them well, to love them creatively, to love them thoroughly, to love them even—especially!—if they are hard to love.

We need to set the example for one another in the way we love.

***Faith-Filled and Faithful***Fourth, Paul says that we should **set an example in our faith.** Watch your commitment.

When we consider what Paul means by *faith*, we are faced with two options. It could be that Paul is telling Timothy he needs to set an example in his faith in God: his confidence, his trust, his reliance on God for salvation and all that follows it.

On the other hand, it could be that Paul is telling Timothy he needs to set an example in his faithfulness: in his living out of that saving faith, his commitment to the Christian life, his fidelity to all the Bible commands of him as a Christian and as a minister.

Tim Challies says the original Greek can support both options and commentaries by expert theologians are roughly divided between the two. He quotes John Stott as saying, the word “could mean either trust in God and in Christ, or trustworthiness, a fundamental Christian fidelity, or both.”

And maybe it is the “both” option we should go with, since the two are so clearly linked: you must have faith to be faithful and cannot have true faith without displaying faithfulness.  The deepest faith leads to the most faithful Christian living.

So perhaps it’s best to conclude that Paul first wants Timothy to set an example in his faith, in his unshakeable confidence in Jesus Christ, in his trust in the Word of God, in his reliance on the promises of God, in all Paul had taught him as his friend, his pastor, his mentor. Spurgeon says: “Faith is believing that Christ is what He is said to be, and that He will do what He has promised to do, and then to expect this of Him.” If a person in Timothy’s church were to ask, “What does it mean to have faith?” they should be able to look at Timothy to find their answer.

But Paul also wants Timothy to live a steadfast life. His faith will lead to faithfulness. Jerry Bridges says, “The faithful person is one who is dependable, trustworthy, and loyal, who can be depended upon in all of his relationships, and who is absolutely honest and ethical in all of his affairs.” His rock-solid assurance in God comes flowing out in all of life and in every one of life’s decisions and responsibilities. His faith is too good, too strong, to remain hidden.

Timothy is to display this exemplary faithfulness, to have a full-out commitment to living out every word of Scripture. He is to commit himself to obedience, to holiness, to love. If a person in his church were to ask, “What does it mean to be faithful?” they should be able to look at Timothy to find their answer.

And the challenge is for us to model the same sort of faith and faithfulness. If we want to live lives that are worthy of being followed, then we need to set an example in faith.

***Purity***And then, fifth, we are to **set an example in purity.** Watch your character.

This word, purity, has to do with sexual conduct. It has to do with how Timothy behaves with the ladies of the church. It has to do with marital fidelity and abstinence outside of marriage. Sexual sins are one of the ways Christians can so quickly stumble.

But more than that, I think this is talking about issues of character. Integrity. How we behave when no one else is watching. It has to do with Godly habits and discipline that remain consistent whether anybody else notices or not.

That’s the key. I think the best way to be a godly example when other people are around is to live the same way when no one is around.

Because, ultimately, this isn’t about putting on certain Christian behaviors to impress your friends or to fit in with other people at church; this is about living a life consistent with what Christ has done for us. This is about living in a way that reflects an awareness of how much Jesus has loved us, the price He paid to redeem us from our sin, and the calling He gives us to live now as temples of His Holy Spirit.

So what about you? Would you be willing to say to someone: “Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ?”

Think of Jay’s story: if life is a journey, if we are all travelling down the interstate of life, would the person in the car behind you be o.k. to follow your taillights? Would you lead them in the right direction?

Set an example for the believers. In your speech. In your conduct. In your love. In your faith. In your purity.

Watch your life and doctrine closely... because if you do, you will save both yourself and those who are watching you.