

Mimics Become Models
1 Thessalonians 1:1-10
(New Century Version)
August 28, 2016

From Paul, Silas, and Timothy. To the church in Thessalonica, the church in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace and peace to you. We always thank God for all of you and mention you when we pray. We continually recall before God our Father the things you have done because of your faith and the work you have done because of your love. And we thank him that you continue to be strong because of your hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. Brothers and sisters, God loves you, and we know he has chosen you, because the Good News we brought to you came not only with words, but with power, with the Holy Spirit, and with sure knowledge that it is true. Also you know how we lived when we were with you in order to help you. And you became like us and like the Lord. You suffered much, but still you accepted the teaching with the joy that comes from the Holy Spirit. So you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and Southern Greece. And the Lord's teaching spread from you not only into Macedonia and Southern Greece, but now your faith in God has become known everywhere. So we do not need to say anything about it. People everywhere are telling about the way you accepted us when we were there with you. They tell how you stopped worshiping idols and began serving the living and true God. And you wait for God's Son, whom God raised from the dead, to come from heaven. He is Jesus, who saves us from God's angry judgment that is sure to come. NCV

If you were to design the perfect house, what would it look like? Maybe it would have a bathroom for every occupant. Perhaps it would have a large kitchen, a family room with a fireplace, and a garage big enough to hold two vehicles and all the junk a family can buy, use once and never use again.

If you were to design the perfect church, what would it look like? It might have a beautifully ornate altar, a world-class pipe organ, an amazing praise band, and only pews in back where all the real Lutherans sit.

If you were to design the perfect pastor, what would he be like? After years of research, a profile of the perfect pastor was developed. He preaches exactly 15 minutes, but covers all the great elements of faith in detail. He bravely condemns sin, but never offends anyone. He works from 8 a.m. to midnight, yet still spends plenty of quality time with his family. He earns only \$100 per week, but wears nice clothes, drives a respectable car, and gives \$75 dollars a week to people in need. He has the energy of a 20 year-old, but has 40 years experience. He is gentle and handsome, loves to work with people of all ages, and is equally gifted in all areas. He makes 20 calls a day on hospital patients and shut-ins, yet is always available in his office when you need him.

Paul considered himself the least of the apostles. He told young Timothy: *Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the worst* (1 TI 1:15 NCV). That's hardly a recipe for perfection. The Christians at Thessalonica weren't perfect either. Yet, by God's grace, Paul and the Thessalonian believers became role models not only the other Christians but also for the unbelievers.

Through faith in Jesus, and by carefully following the guidance of the Holy Spirit,

ordinary sinners like Paul, the Thessalonians, and us can become bright beacons of God's love shining out into the world. By mimicking our Savior, we can become the role models the world so desperately needs.

However, to be a role model you must have a role model. God the Father served as Jesus' role model. Jesus said: *"I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing alone. The Son does only what he sees the Father doing, because the Son does whatever the Father does"* (Jn 5:19 NCV).

In turn, Jesus serves as our role model. He tells us: *"This is my command: Love each other as I have loved you"* (Jn 15:12 NCV). What does it mean to love each other? John the Baptist told the people seeking to repent: *"If you have two shirts, share with the person who does not have one. If you have food, share that also"* (Lk 3:11 NCV).

All of this sounds very good and very Christian. But nothing in this world is that simple. The problem we have is there are role models, other than Jesus, competing for our attention and our obedience. It's in the Garden of Eden that we encounter the first negative role model.

God equipped Adam and Eve with everything they needed to know about living a life to the glory of God. Then Satan came along and offered a different model for living. He offered a model based on pride – "You can be as smart as God." When Adam chose the wrong role model, he sent the world spiraling down into the darkness of sin.

We continue to live with the consequences of Adam's sin. The world is enslaved in the kingdom of Satan. The longer the world exists, the deeper the world sinks into every imaginable vice. The world is trapped in something called progressive perversion – the longer it goes the worse it gets.

Here's how Paul described progressive perversion to the Roman Christians. *People did not think it was important to have a true knowledge of God. So God left them and allowed them to have their own worthless thinking and to do things they should not do. They are filled with every kind of sin, evil, selfishness, and hatred. They are full of jealousy, murder, fighting, lying, and thinking the worst about each other. They gossip and say evil things about each other. They hate God. They are rude and conceited and brag about themselves. They invent ways of doing evil. They do not obey their parents. They are foolish, they do not keep their promises, and they show no kindness or mercy to others. They know God's law says that those who live like this should die. But they themselves not only continue to do these evil things, they applaud others who do them* (Ro 1:28-32 NCV).

If we don't want to live the life the world lives, there is only one alternative. We must look to Jesus as our role model. We must fashion our lives after his life. We must turn our backs on the temptations and the false glory of the world and keep our eyes focused on our Lord.

Once again, that sounds very good. But, once again, it's not as easy as it sounds.

Having Jesus as our role model is more than just church on Sunday. It's more than just popping a few bucks in the offering plate. It's more than just wishing things in the world would get better and everyone would be housed, well-fed, and free. Having Jesus for a role model is hard work – hard work on two different fronts.

First, living like Jesus means getting your hands dirty. James, Jesus' brother, said this: *A brother or sister in Christ might need clothes or food. If you say to that person, "God be with you! I hope you stay warm and get plenty to eat," but you do not give what that person needs, your words are worth nothing* (Jas 2:15-16 NCV).

If Jesus is your role model, then you had better get busy, because Jesus was a man of action. Jesus hung out with the outcast and the sinners. His friends were the blind, the crippled, the deaf, the sick, the dying. He wasn't with them to feel sorry for them and offer empty words and platitudes. Jesus surrounded himself with these people so he could help them – so he could take action on their behalf.

The other hard work of following in Jesus footsteps is faith. Faith is hard work. Believing, in a world full of unbelievers, is not easy. There is no limit to the number of people who would love to see you trade your faith for the bobbles, the trinkets, the worthless junk of this world.

Keeping your faith alive requires work. Your faith is a living thing. If it isn't fed and nourished, it will wither up and die. To keep your faith alive you must worship, not just on Sundays, but every moment of every day. Your very life must be an act of worship.

Your faith also requires daily Bible study. You need to know, and then be constantly reminded, what God has to say to you. You need to be in prayer about everything in your life. You need to be serving you neighbor in the name of Jesus. You need to be witnessing for your Lord in both word and deed. You need to support God's church, both as a thank offering and as a demonstration of your trust in God to tend to your needs.

That might sound like all work and no fun, but that's not true. The greatest joy in life is to: *Love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your strength, and all your mind [and to] love your neighbor as you love yourself* (Lk 10:27 NCV).

To love God with all your heart, soul, strength, and mind is to look to Jesus as your role model. When your only desire in life is to live to please God, you live without fear of tomorrow, without fear of the world, without fear of death. Your heart, soul, and mind are filled with an indescribable joy and peace that can't be found any other way or anywhere else.

To love your neighbor as yourself is to mimic the actions of Jesus so you can be a role model for the world. There is no more loving thing you can do than to use your words and your actions to lead a lost soul to Jesus. To love your neighbor is to live out what you have learned from our Savior.

How wonderful it will be to leave this world knowing that with the help of the Holy Spirit you modeled Jesus to the world, and to hear Jesus say: *You became an example to all the believers ... and the Lord's teaching spread from you ... so now your faith in God has become known everywhere*" (1 Th 1:7-8 NCV).