

And good morning everybody. Good morning to everybody watching online with us and joining us online. My name is Nik Schatz, one of the pastors here, and I'm excited that I get to honor to open the Bible and teach from that. So that's always fun for me. Before I jump into that, by the way, if you wanna, if you have your own copy of the Bible, if you don't, everything will be on the screen. That's fine. Do you have your own copy, you can go to 1 Thessalonians, we're gonna be in that letter today. While you're turning there, while we transition from the cards, passing those in, and I just wanna say thank you real quick. So every year, at least twice in the year, usually in December, at the end of the calendar year, and in June at the end of the fiscal year, we ask you to please give generously to Hershey Free Church to set us up for the new year. To set us up for the new fiscal year, and we even gave a specific challenge this last month. And I just wanna say thank you, you overcame or went above my expectation, I'm not sure how to say that. And so I just wanna say thank you for giving generously to Hershey Free Church. You really did come through in the last month, and that helps us. For the next month or two, we're gonna be planning out the next ministry year and that kind of sets a tone for, Hey, what are we able to do? What are we not able to do so thank you for giving to that.

I had all these stories I wanted to share, but I just take time for one as a result of your giving. So right now, all of the teenagers are at WinterBlast. It's a winter camp. Obviously, they go to at Camp Orchard Hill. There's 99 people that we took. So it's this huge group... Right. In the case, you're wondering, why is it so quiet in here. All the teens are there. So they all went to WinterBlast. There was a new student, and I'm talking like a week and a half ago, their family moved to the Hershey area, she attended the youth group, heard about WinterBlast, wanted to go, but within a few days, can you fork up all this money to go on this camp thing. So anyway, you can imagine, you're a teenager, you're moving into the area, you don't have any friends, just the middle of the school year, there's all these... And it's cold. She was from the South. My goodness, it's cold up here. So all these challenges. Well, hey, we told her about that WinterBlast, and because people like you have been giving for years to Hershey Free and the youth group and stuff, we were able to fund her from a scholarship fund. And so she's instantly matched with all these friends that follow Jesus, and a lot of them go to her school. So it's just like one story, like all these things happen all the time. But we only have time to tell you a couple. So that's one example.

Also in other news, Dean told me for the men's breakfast, they might be able to afford eggs again, so that's kind of cool. But anyway, I'm just getting that the price eggs is outrageous, that's not happening, but...

Okay, so let's jump in. Let's jump in today. So if you're just catching up with us, we have started the new year from here until Easter, we are doing a series called Love This Book, it's actually the fourth time we've done this. Different segments of the Bible, and what we're doing for the next several weeks is we're going through Paul's letters. Now, some of you may be wondering, Okay, who is Paul and why are we reading somebody else's mail from 2000 years ago? That's a great question. So let me try to real briefly introduce you to that in case this is a little bit new to you. So your Bible is divided into two sections. The first half or one-third is called the Old Testament it is the old part, and then the other part is the new part, the New Testament. Sometimes we hear the Old Testament called the Hebrew Bible, because it was written in Hebrew for the Jews. The New Testament, sometimes you call it the Christian Bible, because it was written after the time of Christ at the time of Jesus. Now, the New Testament that we've been going through is basically a compilation of a bunch of letters that were written by some of the first followers of Jesus, and they were scattered to all different churches around the area. Now, the man who wrote the most letters in the New

Testament, his name was Paul. He was a missionary, he was a church planter. He would travel to a city, he would meet with Jews and other people in synagogues, and people of other faiths, and they would convert to Christianity. He would form a church, he would help him form leaders and elders and pastors in that church, and he would move on and do the same thing over again from city to city to city. Now in order to stay in contact before they had Zoom, what he did just to keep in touch with these churches and to make sure they were doing the right thing and living the Christian life and yada, yada, yada, is he would send co-workers to visit them.

And He sent Phoebe or Timothy or somebody to visit and check in and sometimes he would swing by himself. It was hard to do, it was hard to travel, takes a long time in the ancient world. And what he would do is he would write letters to these churches. Now, these letters have a lot of weight to them, and there's a lot of doctrine, there's a lot of good stuff in them. So they would copy the letters and send them on. And we still have them and not the originals, 'cause those kind of materials don't last without disintegrating, but we have copies of these original letters and these are what formed the basis of what should Christians and churches do. So this forms the basis of what we believe, why we believe in what we do. So that's why we're reading other people's mail in other words. So we're gonna be reading from 1 Thessalonians. The church of Thessalonica was one of those churches, he wrote at least two letters that we have a copy of, so we're reading from 1 Thessalonians, we're gonna read verses 2 through 10 of the first chapter.

Okay, if you don't have a copy. That's fine. It'll all be up here. But read the First Thessalonians one versus two through 10, together with me. Paul is writing and he says We, he has some co-workers with him, Silas and Timothy, we always thank God for you all, the people of Thessalonica, the Christians there, and continually mention you in our prayers. 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. Alright, faith, hope, and love. That's like the big three, right? They are exemplary at living out faith, hope, and love. For we know brothers and sisters loved by God, that he has chosen you because our gospel came to you, not simply with words, but also with power with the Holy Spirit, with deep conviction. You know how we lived among you for your sake. You became imitators of us.

I don't know if you'd like to highlight stuff, underline stuff, circle stuff in your Bible, if you do, go ahead and circle or highlight or whatever, that word imitate. That's gonna be the theme for the day. You have imitated us and the Lord, for you welcomed the message in the midst of severe suffering with the joy given by the Holy Spirit. And so you became a model. Those who are imitating Paul are now imitating the faith for other Christians. Alright, model is another form of imitation to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia, there are regions in the area. The Lord's message rang out from you, not only in Macedonia in Achaia, but your faith in God has become known everywhere. Therefore, we don't need to say anything about it. For they themselves report, people are reporting on how on the virtue of the states of in love that this church is doing, the reporting of this kind of reception you gave us. They tell us how you turn to God from idols to serve the living and true God and to wait for his Son from Heaven, and he raised in the dead, Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.

Now, there's a lot of stuff that comes up in that one paragraph, and of course there's a whole letter that we really want to try to cover a little bit, but there's only time for me to cover one theme. It's a theme that comes up really strong in this paragraph, but also in a bunch of the letters that Paul writes, it's the theme of imitation, of imitation. I am modeling Christian faith so that others can see

what it means to follow Jesus in the flesh and blood right in front of them, to be an example. We're gonna study imitation today.

To get us started I wanna just point out in a book that I've been reading called *The Road To Character*, it's by David Brooks, and there's something that he says in the introduction that I thought it might be helpful for you all. So in the intro, he talks about two different virtues that all of us are always working on, there are resume virtues and eulogy virtues. You know the difference in a resume and a eulogy, so a eulogy is what someone says at your funeral, it's what someone has to say about your character, about your morals, about your heart, about your values. Again, about your virtues, it's like who you really are and what you live for, right, that's your eulogy. And of course, your resume virtues are the skills that you have learned along the way. That's the experience, particularly your work experience, that's the knowledge you require, the education that you've had the different jobs you had. That's what a resume is. Now, I think most of us would agree that our eulogy is more important than our resume. However, most of my life and my focus and the influences around me are helping me build my resume, not necessarily my eulogy. So for instance, think about, think about the education system from kindergarten to 12th grade, and some of you went to college, maybe a few of you went to grad school at to that. It's all about building a resume. Okay, maybe you took an Ethics class, maybe you took one philosophy class or maybe a lecture on this or that, or you had a group project and built your character, but for the most part, our education system is all about building your resume. It's how can you learn skills? How can you learn knowledge? How can you get credential for this or that?

Furthermore, I am inundated, probably like you, I'm inundated with ways that I can improve my resume. I have countless books on my shelf. I have countless books in my Amazon shopping cart right now that will help me with my work skills and to obtain more knowledge and become more competent. And life hacks and self-help. I'm inundated with books. I'm invited every month to seminars to all these Zoom seminars they're doing, conferences across the country so that I can help build my resume and become better at what I do, and more competent in this or that. There are more resources at my disposal that I already own that will help me with my resume. I don't even have time to consume them all. Question. What resources are available for me to build my eulogy? Because I am developing my eulogy, whether I think about it or not. So what is available to help me build my character, my virtue is my morals. What is available to build my eulogy and to become that kind of person?

So you can probably think of a few things. There's different resources out there, and there's a lot of ways we can answer that question. I wanna point out one, I wanna focus on one very important way for you to build this kind of character. If you want to develop, if you want to improve your character, you must learn the art of imitation. If you want to improve your character. And by the way, I'm that all of you want to improve your character, otherwise you wouldn't be listening to me, you'd be out vandalizing property somewhere, right? You all, the only reason you're listening is because you do want to improve your character, and if you want to do that, you must learn to imitate. Here's a map of the text and what we're gonna, and how we're gonna find this in the text. Okay, so look back at verse 2. Paul says, we remember before our God and Father, your faith, love, and hope. Like the big three, these are the virtues that they were living these things out, and by the way, and all the letters that Paul wrote to the different churches he almost always reprimands them at some point. Like, Hey, I heard you're doing this, I heard this is happening, this needs to stop, you need to silence these people. And he's always reprimanding. In Thessalonians, there's no reprimand, it's all good job, good job, good job, good job. Keep it up. They are like they are living out faith,

hope, and love. The big three. He says, How did you guys... How did you guys build that kind of Christian character and godly virtue... Look at verse 6. Because you became imitators of me and of the Lord Jesus. You imitated our way of life, and not only that, but you became a model. He goes on, Verse 7, you became a model for all the other churches. When the church has had a church conference to go, they would go to Thessalonica, right? This church was doing the stuff right. They were living a godly lifestyle because they imitated Paul and they live that out. So here's what we're gonna learn, if you want to improve your character, and by the way, I'm assuming if you're still listening, I'm assuming you do want to improve your character, otherwise you'd be out planning a bank heist somewhere, right? You want to improve your character, and so if you want to do so, you must learn the art of imitation.

Now, there's two things in the text, we're gonna see. First off, when it comes to imitation, you need someone to look up to. You need someone to look up to. We learn best by imitating other people. We are told over and over in Scripture to imitate Jesus and to be like him. And the best way to imitate Jesus is to follow flesh and blood people right in front of us who are doing that well. You need other people to look up to. Number two, we're gonna look at this in a little bit. You need someone to look out for. You need to become the kind of person that is worthy of imitation. All of us want someone to tell us, Hey, I'm wanna be like you someday, I've seen your character, your morals, I've seen... I've seen the way that you live your life like... All of us want to be that kind of person. And maybe you would say, I don't want people to imitate me. You're not being humble, you're shirking a responsibility that we have to invest in other people and to live with Jesus, love like Jesus, and lead others to do the same. You're shirking that responsibility. If you say, I don't want people to imitate me. You need to become the kind of person that's looking out for others. So that's what we're gonna learn about today. If you want to improve your character, you must learn to imitate.

Alright. Let's look at number one. Let's look at point number one. We just read Verse 2. I'm gonna start off by saying this imitation is inescapable. You cannot help but imitate the people that are around you, but imitate the people that influence you, you can't help but do it. I'll give you a case in point, I was raised in the South, I was raised in North Carolina. Every time that my family and I go back down south to visit with family or whatever, as soon as we cross the border, it's like a switch goes off in my head and I start using words that my kids have no idea what they mean. I'm a like, Hey, so can you pull the door to... Pull the door to, the door to what? You don't even know that means, it means pull the door shut. I don't know why I say it. That's what we do. It's rubbed off on me. It makes no sense, but it's rubbed off on me. I'll say, Hey, kids look over yonder and my daughter's like, I don't see any any yonders. What's a younder? What we looking for? And I started using these words and nobody understands, I start talking like a hick, this is just, it just happens to me as soon as I go down south. And by the way, the same thing happens to my wife. She was born and raised in Wisconsin, as soon as the first cheese curd hits her lips, she starts talking like a Yupper. And it's 'op', 'op', every other word is 'op'. We gotta scoot right past ya there. Everything, so my kids are like dad, what's wrong with mom? I'm like, bless her heart. Bless her heart, right? It just rubs off on you. You can't help. If you were raised in a certain area, you can't just not talk like that and act like that and think like that. It rubs off on you. We live by imitation. We can't help it. We can choose who we imitate, we can't help but imitate, it's just a part of life.

Here's something that's helpful, that's written by Jason Hood, he wrote a book called imitating God, and here's what he says. Imitation is simply inescapable. From birth to adulthood, imitation drives our behavior and belief. Peer pressure, herd mentality, word of mouth and other social factors and

processes create fresh plausibility structures, that's a tongue twister, that facilitate experimentation with drugs with religion, facial hair, if you like sushi, new television programs, et cetera. We rarely adopt a child or try a new diet or engage in fasting and prayer, unless exemplars model these actions and the mindsets that make the actions possible. We keep up with the Joneses, sometimes with reckless abandon, sometimes almost subconsciously, duplicating their patterns of speech and consumption and dress, and recreation. He goes on and says we are all imitators, shaped in a thousand ways by what we see and hear around us. You can't help but imitate the people that you live around and that you interact with, you can't help it. Okay, there are a thousand little goofy things that you do every single day that you didn't just create yourself, you learned by imitation. The way that you pronounce certain words is it pe-can or pecan? You learn that from your upbringing. It's pe-can, by the way, in case you're wondering. Somebody here disagrees. Let me ask you a question, do you throw a trash in a trash can or a trash can? Point proven. Alright, so that's the proper way to say that.

The way that you pronounce certain words, the kinds of food that you eat. Some of you were raised in this area and you like mine pie, and this is not normal. Right, it's just you grew up in an area... I'm looking at Dave over here, just... You grew up acquiring a taste for gross pie, this is just how it... Right, you are in it, you are the mannerisms that you have. The speed, scientist even say, the speed at which you blink your eyes is learned subconsciously by the people you hang around. You can't help but imitate the people around you. Now, these are all goofy things, right? If you like mince, that's weird, but whatever. So these are all goofy things, but there's a million other important things. What you think about your possessions and how you use your money to help people or help yourself or whatever, the things that you care about, the way that you spend your time. The things that you want and you drive for in life, the way that you treat and interact with other people, the way that you treat animals, the way that you treat the planet. All of this stuff is learned because you are in a certain society surrounded by people and then a family, and then a state.

You can't help but imitate in small ways and in major ways, the people that are around you. And here's why, because you are created in the image of God. You were created, your purpose and creation was to imitate and to represent and be an image bearer of God. That is why we were created. That is what it means to be human. You can't help but imitate someone or something.

Now, I wanna tell you something that's gonna haunt you, or at least it haunted me for the last couple of weeks, right. There was a book written by Greg Beale called *We Are What We Worship* with, he says, and he talks about idolatry, and an idol is basically anything that is not God that you look to, that you pursue, that you worship, in other words, that you give your full attention and drive to it. Here's what he says in that book, here's a sentence, We are either being conformed into an image of the world or to God. So you are either imitating the character of God or you're imitating some kind of warped sinful misrepresentation of what God is not. You are either imitating an idol of the world or God. So here's my question, Are you going to imitate God in his character? Or some sinfulness representation of this character because you're going to imitate someone or something. Okay, hopefully you would say, I wanna imitate God, I wanna imitate his son Jesus.

So how can we do that? How can we become the kind of people that gradually are shaped into the image of Jesus? There's a few different ways that we could answer that question, if you want to grow in your character, though I would argue you must learn to imitate. You must be around other people who are living, other godly men and godly women who are living the kind of lifestyle, following Jesus that you want to live.

Here's another quote that I want to share with you from Darrell Bock. He writes in one of his books, *The individualism that pervades our culture and that works against community and having a commitment to community also works against developing spiritual growth...* unlike a diet or an exercise program, God's program for getting us into spiritual shape requires our working out alongside others. Those believers who dislike assembling with the church or who shun small groups are missing one of the great means that God uses to form us, okay. You will not be able to improve your character only by reading self-help books and trying harder. You will not be able to become more like Jesus only by studying the Bible and praying, you should do those things. But that is not enough. You also need to be around other godly men and other godly women, so that you can imitate their behavior as they are imitating Jesus. This is what the text shows us.

Now, I wanna show you, this doesn't just come up in 1 Thessalonians. Over and over, Paul writes about this, I wanna show you just about splattering of verses. And this isn't all of them. Okay, this is just a handful that I thought would be helpful. 1 Thessalonians 1, You know how we lived among you for your sake? You became imitators of us and of the Lord. 1 Corinthians 11, Imitate me just as I imitate Christ. 1 Corinthians 4, I urge you to imitate me how I follow Jesus Christ Jesus. Philippians 3, pattern your lives after mine and learn from those who follow our example, chapter 4, keep putting into practice all that you learned and received from me, everything you heard from me and saw me doing. 2 Timothy 1, Follow the pattern of sound words that you have heard from me, 2 Thessalonians 3, for you know that you ought to imitate us. We wanted to give you an example to follow. Galatians 4, dear brothers and sisters, I plead with you to live as I do. Over and over and over again, Paul is saying, imitate me, 'cause I'm imitating Jesus. You need to follow my example over and over and over, he says this. And he says this because he knows if you want to improve your character, and by the way, I know that all of you in here and watching online want to improve your character, otherwise you would not have kept listening to me, you would be out kicking puppies and beaten kittens by now, right now, you want to improve your character. So therefore, you must learn the art of imitation.

First off, you need someone to look up to, you have to build meaningful connections with people that are worth imitating. And a good way to start, the first way to start is by regularly and faithfully attending a worship service, like this, you are actually around other Christians. If you haven't joined a group yet, okay, I hope you check that box for looking at a connect group or a live love lead group. This is how you end up developing these relationships and friendships with other godly men and women that you can imitate. This is why Jesus became a human, so we could actually see him and imitate him, and now we can imitate people that are still around with us today. Okay, so you need someone to look up to.

Number two, you need someone to look out for, you need someone to look out for. It's not just about imitating others, you need to become someone worthy of imitation, and then if you know this quote from Oscar Wilde, imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, we all want someone to look up to us. All of us. I would love it nothing more than if my kids were to say one day, Dad, I wanna be like you because I've watched your character. So we need to start becoming the kind of people that others want to imitate.

Okay, let's go back to our text in First Thessalonians One. I'm gonna pick it up. Verse 7, he says, Hey, because you have been imitating me, and my friends, Timothy, and these people, because you have been imitating me. Here's what it says in verse 7, you became a model. Others were imitating

you. Now you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia, no pressure, right? The Lord's message rang out from you, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but your faith in God has become known everywhere. He goes on to say, in other words, Paul has dedicated his life to imitating Jesus, and the church of Thessalonica has been imitating Paul because he is right there in front of them. A representation of what it means to follow Jesus, and now this church has become a model for other churches to follow. Now, modeling godly character doesn't just come up here, it comes up elsewhere, and Paul where Paul says imitate me, but also imitate these other people who are doing this well. Look at, look at this in Philippians 3, learn from those. So imitate these others who I recommend that are following godly character, imitate these people. Hebrews 6, we don't know who wrote Hebrews, but a lot of scholars believe Paul did. Hebrews 6, follow the example of those who are going to inherit God's promises because of their faith and endurance. So we follow Jesus, but we also follow other people that are following Jesus. Hebrews 13, remember your leaders who spoke the word of God to you. Considered their outcome, the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith. Imitate. Imitate.

I'm gonna take a pause for a second. I wanna take a time out, because if you're like me, when I was getting to research is when I was thinking about this and looking up these splattering of verses, and this isn't all of them, there's times where Paul says I was like a father to you and there's all these other ways where he says to imitate me and to be like me, and a pattern in your life after me. There were a lot of times where I thought, wait is this a flex from Paul, is he just being arrogant? It sounds kind of arrogant. You and I wouldn't talk like this, you're not gonna walk around going, Hey, you guys should be like. We just don't talk like this. Right, so is Paul being arrogant? As I researched this, there's a couple of things that I have, a couple of conclusions that I've come to that I wanna share with you. First off, Paul's not being arrogant in his letters, but rather he's being real. There's actually several times in his letters where he points out his flaws, right. There's one verse where he says that he was the chief of sinners, like take all the sinners of the world, line them up, and I'm in the back of the line. I'm the chief of sinners. There's another text where he says that he calls himself a savage and says, the only way that God could get my attention, the only way, the only reason I became a Christian is because God literally stopped me. He physically blinded me, that's the only way he could get my attention. So Paul was very open about his faults, but he's also open about, Hey, I'm trying to live out my godly example, and you guys should follow my example, You guys should follow after the words that I'm saying. Okay, there's nothing at arrogant, he's being real.

Secondly, this is a reasonable expectation for someone in his position. Paul and his colleagues are running around the known world, the Roman Empire, forming these churches and establishing elders in these churches, it's a reasonable expectation that his life should back up what he's saying. His walk should back up his talk. In fact, if you study other of his letters where he talks about the qualifications of an elder, but part of the qualification is you better be worthy of other people following you, and if you're not living a godly life, I don't care what you know, what your education, you can't be an elder, you can't be a pastor. But this is part of the job interview, to be a pastor, you have to, your Facebook page and everything, you have to live it out. And this is a reasonable expectation, you have to live out what others should be replicating and imitate. This is a reasonable expectation for Paul to expect others to be able to imitate him. And then lastly, Paul repetitively says this, because I think he believed these two things that all of us needs someone to look up to. I benefit so much from reading about Jesus, but I also benefit from seeing someone right in front of my face, that is living out the life of Jesus. We need someone to look up to, and we also need something to look out for. We need to be living the kinds of lives that others can look to us and imitate. And so Paul is someone who he is mentoring men and women who become the next

missionaries and the next church planters, people like Timothy and Titus, and Priscilla and Lydia, these were missionaries and church planters that Paul was mentoring and trying to live out, Hey, here's the model of how you do this.

Paul is the one who he mentored the first pastor of the first churches, men like Apophroditus and women like Phoebe and Nympha, the first pastor of these churches, he was mentoring them and trying to imitate to them what Godly living and pastoring should look like. It is a reasonable expectation for Paul to see himself as someone who should be worthy of imitation. And he would also say this, maybe you're not there yet, but you should become the kind of person that is worthy of imitation. Or in the words of the mission of our church, lead others to do the same. You should become this kind of person. Alright, and he actually says this to a couple of individuals, here's one of his letters written to a young man named Timothy, who was a pastor. 1 Timothy 4, be an example to all believers in what you say, in the way you live, in your love and your faith and in your purity. Be an example, be worthy, be someone that others can imitate. He wrote this to a man name Titus, In everything set them an example by doing what is good. Set the example, be the example.

This is just how we learn, we learn how to live by imitating others. Long ago when I was in high school, longer to go, then I like to admit. So when I was in high school, there was a man who, David Duke, he told me this one day, he said, Nik, the best thing you can do is to find a man of God and grab ahold of him and never let go. I took that figuratively because I didn't wanna end up in juvenile jail, right, but what I did was I went on the search, who was the most godly man that I can find, and I wanna follow then, I wanna learn from them. And so the person I found was the first person I found was Doug Weber, he was a teacher in my school at the time, and he was the closest thing that Jesus that I could find it. So I started following him, and this was before, I don't mean social media, I mean actually following him And so what I would do is sometimes I would scarf my lunch down and I'd leave the lunch room and I'd go sit in his office 'cause he was a teacher there, I'd go sit in his office and we would just talk about faith and talk about life and the Bible, whatever. We'd just talk. I probably bugged him to death, he never said I did. There were times where I went over to his house, invited, I went over to his house and I got to watch this guy, I got to watch him play with his kids and give them chores and get on them for doing the wrong thing and praise them. I got to watch him do all this stuff, I got to watch him interact with his wife. There were times where he frustrated his wife, and I got to watch him kind of smooth that over with her. When do you get to actually watch people to do these things? I got a front row seat. And how Mr. Weber lives out of state, just like normal day stuff, and that has shaped so much of who I am today.

Here's another example. So that was high school, after I'd gotten into college, my college years, so I was young, 20s, 19 or 20, something like that. I needed a place to stay one night, and so I stayed the night with this couple named the Hagenbushes, Mr and Mrs Hagenbush. And they probably thought nothing of this, but after dinner that night, they had little preschoolers, one that was a toddler and one a little bit older, and after dinner, we gathered in their living room and they sang these praise songs. I don't know what they were like, He's got the whole world in His hand, those kind of things. We sang a couple of songs with them, the kids are dancing and singing, it's fun, and then he gets open a Bible and he reads a couple of verses, they pray together and they go to bed, it was just 10 minutes. And they probably thought nothing of it, just 10 minutes. But because of that, because of watching that for 10 minutes, I thought, if Rick Hagenbush can do it, I think I can do it. And so you fast forward 10 years from then and you're gonna find my wife and I, Anna and I, in a tiny apartment in Dallas, in the living room, singing praise songs with the kids, reading the Bible,



praying together, and then shuffling off to bed. Does the Bible tell me exactly how to do the family devotions? No, but I got to watch, this is how you do it, this is one of the ways to do it. I got to watch it, and I've been doing it for years. Just because of that 10-minute interaction of watching someone do this. I could go on and on and share a tons of examples, even to this day, there's a retired pastor, he lives on the West Shore, I meet up with him every six to eight weeks or so. I'll drive over to the west shore and we'll walk and we'll talk, I'll tell them what I'm thinking about, what I'm praying about, what I complain to him. Like all this stuff, right? And he tells me I'm wrong and I should do this. Find a godly man, a godly woman, and just to just grab a hold of them. This is how you learn to follow Jesus. This is how you improve your character. If you want to improve your character, and I know you do, because if you didn't wanna improve your character, you would not still be listening, you would be out stealing Amazon packages on somebody's front porch. You care about this, I know it. You must learn the art of imitation. You need someone that you can follow, and you need to become the kind of person that you can imitate. This is how you grow in your character and in following Jesus.

Now, with that said, I wanna, I started with something from this book, I'm gonna finish by close by reading something, just a couple of minutes here, from that book by Brooks. So here's the quote on the screen I believe. You can't build rich character simply by reading sermons or following abstract rules. And he's not saying sermons are bad, I hope not, this is what I'm doing, right? But example is the best teacher. Moral improvement occurs most reliably when we come into contact with people we admire and love and we consciously and unconsciously bend our lives to mimic theirs. Hershey Free Church, don't just work on your resume, work on your eulogy. And if you want to improve your eulogy, you want to work on your godly character, you must learn to imitate. You need someone to look up to. Who are you imitating? Who was a godly man, a godly woman? A godly peer that you're watching? What are the groups at Hersey Free Church where you were gathering to talk about these things and observe one another, and study the Bible together, and talk about this? What are the teams, the volunteer teams that you're a part of where you're like doing this stuff together? Who are you following?

And number two, you need someone to look out for. Are you someone that's worth imitating? How are you working on becoming the kind of person that others could imitate? I'm gonna give a final challenge, I'm gonna give one more challenge to those of you who do volunteer and serve in leadership at the church here. This church, the church of Thessalonica, he says they became a model for the other churches. If the Roman empire had a church leaders conference, everybody pulled up to Thessalonica Free church, right? What could we do to become the church, we're real, they're real. How can we be that? How can the ministry you serve be that? I want you to think about that, and if you're a leader, volunteer like I know I don't need to give you ideas, you're going with it... You're already going with it.

One last thought, if I can, if I can get 60 more seconds from you. Some of you are listening, some of you are watching online, and maybe you're not a church goer, you don't come to church. You're not a church goer. Maybe you would say that you respect Jesus, that you enjoy reading about Jesus, and you respect the way he lived his life and stuff, but you haven't taken a step of devoting your life and service to him. I mean that's a big step, it's one thing to respect Jesus as another thing to go all in and like every day this is what I do, I follow this guy, I'm devoting my life. That's a big step. So maybe you're listening in here, maybe your online watching and you say, I respect Jesus, I haven't plunged in and drank the Kool-Aid, right. I'm glad you're listening first off, 'cause you've given me 25 minutes of your time. That's a big deal. I recognize that. I just wanna say, I just wanna make sure

I represent, since we're studying Paul, I wanna represent well, what he says. What Paul would say, if he was here and could grab this little bar piece thing I got, he would say, Listen, the only reason I'm saying to follow me is because I'm trying to follow Jesus. That's the only reason I would ever say that. Right, you would never say that. The only reason I'm saying over and over to imitate me is because I'm trying to imitate Jesus, and I just wanna let you know that the only reason Hersey Free Church gathers here, week after week after week, it's not because we're trying to be good, right? We don't have a goal in life just to be "more gooder". That's not... It's because we believe that Jesus was God in the flesh, that he came to this world, he died and he resurrected from the dead. That's a big deal, like people don't resurrect from the dead after being locked in a tomb for three days, like this doesn't happen. Right. And if that happened, that he's really God and whatever he said, it must mean something besides be good, right? There must be something more to this and just being moral.

And so I wanna challenge you, if you would say, I respect Jesus, I haven't plunged in and gone all Christian or anything, if that's you, I just wanna challenge you, if you respect Jesus, to explore and study what did he really care about, what was his real message, what was he really all about? And if you're not sure where to go with that, feel free to contact me. I'd love to go out to lunch with you or something, and I also wanna point out if you want someone to pray with you, or if you wanna talk about this now, we're gonna have members of our prayer team up in the front. With that said, if you're on our prayer team, and you are available to pray with people after the service, you can go ahead and stand, I'm gonna close and pray in a second, you can go ahead and stand and come up to the front and make yourself available. Please come and pray. You don't have to say anything. They'll pray with you if you want. Okay, with that said, let me pray for you all and for you all watching online as well.

Father, I wanna thank you for Jesus and for sending him as a human like us to live out an example for us, and of course, to sacrifice his life and forgiveness of our sins. Father, I also wanna pray for all of my friends that are here with me and listening with me, that we would be able to find godly men and women that we can imitate. I also wanna pray that you would gradually over time, shape our character, shape our lives, into the kind of character that would be a model for godly living for others. Lord, grant us mercy when we mess up, but also grant us grace to pursue Christ-likeness a little more, each and every day. We pray this to you, Father and in the name of your Son, Jesus, and by the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Well, with that said, I wanna thank you for giving me your attention and I just wanna remind you that we're not, I'm not gonna dismiss you. Church isn't something you just attend, it's who you are, it's what you do. So you are not being dismissed, but you are being sent to imitate Jesus. You are being sent to model a life of Godly living, you are being sent to become the kind of person that is worth imitating. You were not dismissed. You are sent. Thank you.