

## INTRODUCTION

There was a young man who showed up for church on Easter and as he was leaving, he shook hands with the pastor at the door of the church. The pastor said, "Son, you need to join the army of the Lord."

The man said, "Reverend, I'm already in the army of the Lord."

The pastor said, "Then why do you only show up on Christmas and Easter?"

The young man said, "I'm in the secret service."

God isn't looking for people who will be secret believers. Someone said there is no such thing as a secret believer. Either the secret will destroy the belief or the belief will destroy the secret.

Paul wrote his first letter to the believers at Thessalonica and he commended them for being a model to other believers. In this message I want to talk about living the life of a model.

Living in a home with one wife and two daughters required me to have my own television set. They weren't interested in ESPN and I wasn't interested in their programs. Even when my daughters were grown and married they tended to watch the same shows. One of their favorites was Project Runway. When Jenni was in Missouri doing her residency and Laura Grace was in Norman in graduate school, they would call and talk about the latest episodes. Now I can honestly say I've never seen one episode of Project Runway, but I've been told that it's a reality show about fashion designers and models hoping to get a break and make it in the fashion industry. The designers make dresses out of unusual materials like duct tape.

These aspiring designers and models want to become professionals. I can only imagine how tough it might be to live the life of a fashion model. Fortunately, you don't have to be a fashion model to live a life of a model. In this passage Paul writes about the importance of being a model of the Christian life to other believers.

1 Thessalonians 1:6-10. "You became imitators of us and of the Lord; in spite of severe suffering, you welcomed the message with the joy given by the Holy Spirit. And so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. The Lord's message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia—your faith in God has become known everywhere. Therefore we do not need to say anything about it, for they themselves report what kind of reception you gave us. They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath."

In Acts 16 Paul visited Philippi. The significance of this was that this was the first European city where he preached. Until this time, he had been preaching in Asia Minor. In Philippi, Paul and Silas were arrested and beaten, but God delivered them from jail in the middle of the night. That's where the Roman soldier in charge asked Paul, "Sir, what must I do to be saved?" Paul said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household." (Acts 16:31).

From there, Paul and Silas traveled to Thessalonica, which was the second European city where they preached. Acts 17 tells us Paul preached there for only three weeks and many of the prominent Jews and Gentiles became believers. However, there was a group of Jews who opposed Paul and whipped up a mob to incite a riot.

They accused Paul and Silas of being heretics who were "turning the world upside down." That's an amazing accusation. There are people who live their entire lives and never have much of an impact on the world. And here was a couple of Christians who were accused of turning the world upside down. I think they got it backwards. The world without Christ is upside down, and as followers of Jesus, we're turning it right side up!

Paul later sent Timothy back to Thessalonica to encourage and help the young church. When Paul wrote this letter them, they already had a great reputation among the churches in Asia Minor and Europe. They were model believers. Paul wrote: "You became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia—your faith has become known everywhere."

The word "model" comes from the Greek word *typos*, from which we get our English word "type." Another way to ask this question would be, "What TYPE of Christian are you?"

Of course, our primary role model is Jesus. But our lives should serve as a model to other believers. Let's look at four different ways that we should model the Christian life to others.

### **1. Do you model the spirit of hospitality?**

Paul wrote in verse six, "You welcomed the message with the joy given by the Holy Spirit." Then in verse nine he wrote, "They report what kind of reception you gave us." The believers there not only welcomed the message of God, they welcomed the messenger of God. They demonstrated hospitality to Paul and his companions. Paul, Silas, and Timothy, were travelers, and yet the people in Thessalonica welcomed them into their homes and into their hearts.

Hospitality is one of the most powerful Christian virtues. The Bible says, "Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality." (Romans 12:12-14)

Who are the people that you invite to your table? Is your family, your close-knit group of friends? That's not Christian hospitality. That's Christian fellowship.

The word for "hospitality" in the New Testament has a very clear meaning. It is a combination of two words: *phileo* (brotherly love) and *xenos*, which means "stranger." It literally means, "Love demonstrated to strangers."

Do you show the love of God to strangers? Every Sunday there are newcomers who visit our church. They are strangers looking for friendship. When you leave church I encourage you to turn on your NCR, New-Comer Radar, and look around for someone you can meet and demonstrate hospitality.

By the way, hospitality doesn't have to happen in your home. Any time you show kindness or love to a stranger, you're fulfilling this word. And it's a good thing to be nice to strangers. In Hebrews 13:2 the Bible says, "Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing, some people have entertained angels without knowing it."

Can you imagine being in heaven and an angel comes up to you and says, "Do you remember that time you stopped to help someone with a flat tire? That was me!" Or "Do you remember that time you welcomed a stranger into your home for a meal? That was really me!"

Are you a model in your hospitality to strangers?

## **2. Do you model repentance from the wrong way of living?**

Paul wrote that they were models because "they tell how you turned to God from idols." Notice the order of those statements. It's important to note Paul DIDN'T say they turned from idols to God; it says they turned to God from idols. I may be splitting hairs, but some theological hairs need to be split.

Thessalonica was a Roman city, so the residents practiced the worship of idols like Apollo, Venus, and the entire pantheon of gods and goddesses. When Paul preached, we don't have any record that Paul yelled at them about the need to turn from idol worship. He simply preached that Jesus was the Messiah. He called on them to turn to God. And in turning to God, they were automatically turning from their idols.

To me this is important because some people insist salvation is a two-step process. First, you must turn from your sins, and only then can you place your faith in Jesus. In other words, get rid of your addictions, your gossip, your drunkenness, your lying, and when you've cleaned up your life, then you're ready to come to Christ. But that's not what the Bible teaches.

Faith is one step with two consequences. When a person turns to God, they are turning from their sinful past. Take your hand and place it front of your face with the palm facing you. Now, turn your hand around so the palm is facing away from you. The backside of your hand is now facing you, and the palm is facing away. That isn't two separate actions; it was only one. Even so, you cannot turn to Christ without turning away from your sin. That turning is repentance.

You may be thinking, "Well, they were worshipping idols back then. We don't have any idolatry in our culture today." Think again. I read a quote by Ray Stedman when he said, "I heard of a Chinese man who visited here and was asked upon his return to China whether Americans worshipped idols. 'Yes, they do,' he reported. 'They have three of them. In the winter they worship a fat man in a red suit. In the spring they worship a rabbit. And in the fall they sacrifice a turkey!'"

Our idols today are man-made celebrities, sports stars, and our palaces of greed we've built with our own hands. Repentance isn't just a one-time action. The command to repent in the Bible is most often spoken to churches and believers. As God reveals more and more truth to us, we must continue to change our mind about truth and bring our beliefs in line with God's Word.

This has been a devastating week in our nation. First, there was the bombing at the Boston Marathon on Monday, and then the explosion of the fertilizer plant in West just a few days later. The first was an act by evil men, and the second was an accident. Whenever events like this happen, people start asking the question, "Why did these things happen?"

"Did those people killed and wounded in the bomb attacks deserve it because they were bad people?" Of course not. "Did those firefighters and first responders who died in the explosion deserve it?" Of course not.

There are no easy answers, but there is one big truth. We live in a fallen, sinful world. There are evil people in this world. And because of sin we live in a messed-up natural world. Romans 8:22 tells us that this capricious creation is groaning to be redeemed. This groaning nature is the reason we have tornados, earthquakes, and accidents.

If you think God caused these events of this past week because He was punishing them, you need to repent. You need to change your mind about God and about reality.

Pay attention to how Jesus addressed the problems of evil people and natural disasters.

Now there were some present at that time who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices. (Like the Marathon bombers, here was the bloody act of a wicked man) Jesus answered, "Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way? I tell you, no! But unless you repent (change your way of thinking), you too will all perish. Or those eighteen who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them (like West, this was a natural disaster, an accident) —do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem? I tell you, no! But unless you repent (change your way of thinking), you too will all perish." (Luke 13:1-4)

The world has always had to deal with wicked people like Pilate, Nero, Hitler, the 9/11 terrorists, and now these two brothers. We've always had to deal with natural accidents and disasters like earthquakes and floods. But instead of blaming God or thinking these people deserved their pain; we should change our thinking, repent.

The great theologian and writer, R.C. Sproul wrote: In effect what Jesus was saying was this: "You people are asking the wrong question. You should be asking me, 'Why didn't that tower fall on MY head?'" (*The Holiness of God*, p. 161)

We struggle with the age-old question of why do bad things happen to good people. But the Bible reminds us there is none good except God. And we should instead be focusing on the goodness of God and asking, "Why do good things happen to bad people, like me?" But that kind of thinking requires repentance. Are you a model of repentance to other believers?

### **3. Do you model obedience to God?**

Paul wrote, "you serve the living and true God." He was contrasting God with their idols. Idols

were dead and false. God is living and true. Our motivation for obedience is love. Jesus said, "If you love me, you will obey what I command." (John 14:15)

God wants us to obey Him. One of my favorite times each week is WEBS. Wednesday Evening Bible Study, here at 6:00 p.m. Over the past year, we've been following the life of Moses. Last Wednesday we were studying Numbers 20 and I talked about the day Moses struck out. They were in the desert with no water and God told Moses to speak to the rock and water would gush out. Years earlier, in Exodus 17, God had instructed Moses to strike the rock with his staff, and the water came out. Moses was angry at the people for their constant griping and complaining, and instead of obeying God and simply speaking to the rock; he lashed out and struck the rock—not once, but twice. Water came out of the rock. But God took Moses aside and said, "Moses, because you didn't trust me enough to obey me, you won't lead the people into the promised land."

Wow. After leading those gripers for over forty years, He missed out on the chance to lead them into Canaan. And it was simply because he refused to obey God. Striking the rock wasn't the reason Moses didn't lead them into Canaan. It was symptom of the reason Moses was disqualified from leading them into the Promised Land. God needed someone who would obey Him precisely. Moses was a great leader, but he had a problem with his temper. He wanted to do things His way. God knew He needed a leader like Joshua. Their first obstacle in Canaan was the strongest fort in the world: Jericho. And God was going to give them specific directions to march around the city for seven days, and on the seventh day to march around it seven times, and then shout. Can't you see Moses running into Jericho wielding his staff, beating on the thick walls?

The lesson is this. In our walk with God, there are times when He guides us into deeper and deeper truth. At each point, we must obey Him. When we stop obeying and serving Him, that's when we forfeit the very best He has in store for us.

All of us have heard or read the Bible, but are we obeying it? James addressed this problem when he wrote, "Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it—he will be blessed in what he does." (James 1:22-25)

The Bible is like a mirror. When you look into a mirror, you are able to evaluate yourself to see if anything needs to be fixed or changed. There are two ways to look into a mirror. You can glance at it quickly, or you can gaze into it deeply.

Do you remember the old television show, "Happy Days?" Fonzie was the essence of cool. Whenever the Fonz passed a mirror, he'd glance in it, pull out his comb, and say, "Heeey!" He didn't have to do a thing because he was perfection. It just took a glance.

That's NOT the way to study the Word. We need to gaze into it deeply, and allow it to be a mirror to show us the things in our lives that we need to change in order to be obedient to God.

When you play follow the leader, the closer you are to the leader, the easier it is to imitate them. The closer you are to Jesus, the more you can model obedience to God.

#### **4. Do you model hope as you look for the return of Jesus?**

Paul wrote that the believers in Thessalonica were good models as "... (you) wait for his Son from heaven." The early believers expected Jesus to return at any time. They didn't sell their goods and quit their jobs and stand on a mountain staring at the sky. They continued to live their lives, but they lived with a sense of excited expectation that their Savior would return soon.

We're citizens of the United States, but as followers of Jesus, we hold dual citizenship. Paul wrote, "But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body." (Philippians 3:20-21)

As we've seen this week, this is a messed-up world. There has been a lot of sorrow and pain. People are afraid about the future. As followers of Jesus, we have the most valuable commodity that the world has to offer. It's not money; it's not oil; it's not gold; it's not fame or power. We have hope. H.O.P.E. Having Only Positive Expectations.

I say it's the most valuable commodity, because you can't buy it at any cost. It is a gift from God. And our HOPE can be condensed into one word: Jesus. We are looking for that glorious hope and the appearing of our Great God and Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. This world is not wandering in some misguided direction with no destination in sight. God is bringing His creation to a His planned conclusion. Jesus is going to return and reign.

When I was in seminary, I spoke at a Christian orphanage in London, Kentucky. This school taught that Jesus was going to come in the clouds and take us home to be with Him. These kids didn't have much worldly hope, but they sure had a heavenly hope. The director of the orphanage showed me the smudges on the windows of the orphanage. He said they have a hard time keeping the windows clean because the children loved to put their faces to the windows and look at the sky. I'll never forget that. Do you keep the windows of your life smudged up with your hopeful looking for the return of Jesus?

#### **CONCLUSION**

It's been a busy news week. In the midst of all it, some people missed the homegoing of several model believers who went to heaven. George Beverly Shea and Brennan Manning both died this week. And we also said goodbye to a model believer from the world of sports, Pat Summerall, who died at age 82. He was only a model for the last few years of his life. Many of us grew up hearing him provide football coverage with John Madden. He also announced golf for CBS as well.

He lived an interesting life. His parents divorced before he was born. He was sent to live with an aunt in Florida. His name was George but they called him Pat and it stuck. He was born with a clubfoot and it was thought that he would never play sports. Doctors straightened his foot, but

they said he would never run. But Pat proved them wrong. He went on to play college football at Arkansas and play in the NFL, where he kicked 100 field goals.

He struggled with alcoholism. And after the 1992 Masters broadcast he was following his familiar ritual of drinking until he was vomiting in his hotel room bathroom. On that night he said the lights in the bathroom became brighter than usual and he saw himself for who he really was—a man who needed some help. He spent time in the Betty Ford Clinic where he conquered his addiction with God's help. He said, "My thirst for alcohol was replaced with a thirst for knowledge about faith and God."

This quest led Pat to Christ, and he accepted Jesus and was baptized at First Baptist Church in Euleus. Here's how he described his baptism: "For the first time in my life, I knew what people meant about being 'born again,' I had already accepted that Jesus Christ was the Son of God who died for our sins. Now, I felt I was truly part of his family. I felt ecstatic, happier, and freer. It felt as though my soul had been washed clean. It was the most helpless feeling I've had. And the most invigorating."

Pat reported that he had told Cowboys Coach Tom Landry about that night in Augusta when he saw all the lights get brighter. Coach Landry had coached Summerall with the giants. Landry told him that wasn't an accident. God had sent angels to get his attention. And as Summerall looked back on it, he said with that deep voice that we all loved, "I thought, there's the answer."

Jack Graham, Pastor at Prestonwood Baptist Church preached Pat's funeral on April 20. Jack said on Easter Sunday a few weeks ago, Pat was standing on the front row at Prestonwood with his wife Cheri. As the congregation sang, "The Old Rugged Cross," tears were streaming down Pat's face. Jack said it wouldn't be any of the Super Bowls or the Masters where he would remember Pat Summerall. It would be that scene of him weeping as he thought about the impact of the cross on our lives.

## OUTLINE

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2. Do you model repentance from the wrong way of living?

"...they tell how you turned to God from idols"

3. Do you model obedience to God?

"...you serve the living and true God"

4. Do you model hope as you look for the return of Jesus?

"...(you) wait for his Son from heaven"

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For the Joy...  
Pastor David Dykes