

I recently had to install a new garage door opener and yes, some assembly was required. The nice salesman at Menards assured me that assembly would not be difficult. "Everything is pretty 'straightforward.'" In other words, not too tough; the kind of task any do-it-yourselfer with average intelligence and mechanical skill could tackle in an afternoon. Upon opening the box I found the main unit with the motor, the belt, three rolls of wire, a segmented track, electric eyes, various mounting brackets, a few other pieces of hardware, and a hefty bag of nuts, bolts, and washers. Of course there were detailed instructions complete with drawings and diagrams. I can smile now but on that day I was concerned that this task wasn't quite as simple as the salesman had suggested. Straightforward? Hmm. Had I bit off more than I could chew? Then it dawned on me. Maybe I could find something on youtube. Maybe there's a person who actually shows how to do the assembly. Sure enough, the manufacturer had lots of youtube entries, one for every model. Step by step someone clearly shows you what to do to from start to finish. They install the garage door opener and you can imitate every step. Through the marvel of the pause and replay button you can watch over and over, to your hearts content, any step that you have yet to grasp. Just keep watching till you get it. Everything becomes 'straightforward' when you can watch someone else who knows what they are doing.

Example is always the best teacher. Remember this from childhood? (with motions) This is the way we wash our hands, wash our hands, wash our hands... This is the way we comb our hair... this is the way we brush our teeth...It's learning by example. Don't just tell me what to do, show me how! That's how we learn. St. Paul understood the power of example. He recognized the importance of 'show me' when it came to following Jesus in real life. What does that look like? It wasn't enough to just, tell. St. Paul says, "Watch me." "Brethren, join in following my example, and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us." He makes a similar exhortation to the churches at Corinth, Galatia, and Thessalonica. "Imitate me." Does that sound cocky, arrogant, boastful? There has never been any shortage of those who love being in the spotlight, who crave being the center of attention. When St. Paul says, "Imitate me", self-glory is not his goal. Because we are influenced by the behavior of others, Paul intends to teach what following Jesus means through his actions. His manner of life is in stark contrast to those in Philippi who claimed to be Christians but hardly lived like one. Since Paul describes this group only enough to condemn them, we cannot be absolutely sure of their identity. Those in the church at Philippi could certainly identify them. Paul is probably pointing to those who are like the ones he had to deal with at Corinth. They were proud, secular, super-spiritual men of knowledge who said, "we belong to Christ" and yet emptied the cross of its content. Instead of living godly and pure lives they became very comfortable with sin. In their minds and in their actions they conformed to living just like those who were enemies of the cross. It's nothing new that Christians want to have it both ways; bear the name Christian but

live in a way that is counter to the cross. When Paul says, “for me to live is Christ” he means that to be, not embracing sin, not getting comfortable and cozy with immorality or wickedness but resisting evil, abstaining from what displeases God.

This past week the pope charged one of the leading presidential candidates was “not a Christian” because he doesn’t agree with his immigration policy. Had he zeroed in on those things that God clearly condemns; glorifying greed, immorality, or support for killing unborn babies his words might have had some clout. St. Paul marks those as enemies of the cross “whose god is their appetite, whose glory is their shame, and who set their mind on earthly things.” Your manner of life communicates a message. Are your goals and energy, your dreams and wealth focused primarily on the things of this life? Paul presents you with a reality check concerning your faith. “For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory.” St. Paul calls you and me to keep our eyes on the prize. One of the most helpful ways of keeping your eyes on the prize is by keeping your eyes on people who walk by faith, those who influence you for the good. Remember, an example is the most powerful teacher of all. Those with whom you spend time, who you ‘hang with’,... that affects how you think and how you live. The examples of those who influence your mind, your psyche, your heart; those people affect your relationship with God. St. Paul is bold to say, “Imitate me”. He said so not because he lived without sin, far from it, but because he knew what life was all about, because he had a genuine faith in Jesus and he was living out his faith in the real world. As he worked hard in THIS world he never lost sight of the world to come. Imitate me.

Who do you imitate? God places people in your life who are worthy of you to imitate, people whose example will help you. Many of you have been blessed with godly parents. There have been other people along the way in your life. During my first three years in the ministry I served a church in northern Indiana. A pastor from a neighboring congregation had a huge and lasting effect in my life. He was a mentor whose wise counsel, love for his people, understanding of God’s Word and ability to apply concretely, his cheerful spirit, his work ethic, integrity, the way he listened, the way he loved his wife... in other words his example... his example had a huge influence in my life that continues to this day. He had so much to give that I couldn’t help but want to imitate him. Pastor Bob Koch never said, “imitate me” but his life as a man of God was an open invitation for me to emulate. God has placed people in your life and He still does who greatly help you in your walk with Jesus by their example. Identify them. Imitate their faith. Your faith in Jesus is all about a relationship with Him. It is accompanied by a relationship with those who’ll help you keep your eye on the prize.

Following the godly example of those whom God places in your life has a flip side. The other side of following a strong example, is giving one. You might feel like you could never say,

“Follow my example; Imitate my faith” but remember: you have much to give. There are people in your life, people with whom you work, neighbors, members of your family, where your godly example is being watched and considered more than you know. You may not realize the impact your example is having on someone who recognizes and values that your relationship with God is for real. It’s not about putting yourself on a pedestal or being arrogant, it’s knowing who you are as a believer in Jesus. It’s confidence in your identity as a baptized child of God, knowing that you have been blessed to be a blessing. It’s walking in the light so that YOU ARE a light. “Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven.” That’s about... example! There are people in your life who need someone who doesn’t just talk the talk but walks the walk, someone to model, to demonstrate, to show them what the Christian life looks like in real time.

Go from here today seeking out those whose godly example will help you in your walk with God. Go from here today knowing that your example of godliness is a powerful witness of the real relationship you have with Jesus to those who are watching you. Example is always the best teacher. God’s written Word is never more straightforward than when you see someone living their faith and when others see faith lived out in you. Amen.