

# Follow the Pattern

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Proper 22

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2 Tim. 1:1-14

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Grace, peace, and mercy be to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Who is your hero? Today, it is the age of superheroes in the movies. Marvel has created a cinematic universe, with heroes from Captain America to Thor to Iron Man to the Incredible Hulk. At the same time, D.C. is not far behind, working to make their own cinematic universe, bringing together Batman, Superman, and Wonder Woman in their film “Batman V. Superman: Dawn of Justice.”

While some of you may continue to watch or read about these heroes into your adult years, some of you may have others for heroes. Police officers; firefighters; marines; politicians; celebrities; musicians or singers—the list could go on and on for these as well.

Perhaps you even try to imitate your hero in some way or another. You may try to make good decisions based on the choices you’ve seen your hero make. It’s like you want some part of your hero to rub off on you in some little—or maybe some big—way.

In the book of Hebrews, it seems like the author has composed a long list of Biblical heroes. From Abel and Enoch to Abraham and Isaac, Moses and Gideon to Samson and David, it is an impressive list.

While none of these men were any more than that—mere men—they were examples to be followed in their faith. The author of Hebrews includes this list to remind us of heroes we may have from the Old Testament and how they were faithful throughout their lives. He does this to show that they remained true to the Word of God, even though they had not yet seen the Messiah who would be coming. How much more do we have, knowing who our Savior is?

This morning, we heard a letter from Paul drawing on the same concept. He was writing to Timothy, his beloved son in the faith—one on whom he had laid his hands at Timothy’s ordination. The focus of this part of his letter is that Timothy should not be ashamed of the Gospel he had been taught but that he should instead hold fast to and follow the pattern of sound teaching that he had received.

## Verse 1

Like a good mentor, Paul opens his letter to Timothy “I thank God...as I remember you constantly in my prayers night and day. As I remember your tears, I long to see you, that I may be filled with joy. I am reminded of your sincere faith that dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, dwells in you as well.”

Paul cannot help but express his joy in his remembrance of his younger brother in the faith. He eagerly longs to be with him again. Yet even in his writing to Timothy of his faithfulness and work in the ministry of the Gospel, Paul also ties Timothy’s faith to those who had come before him, and who had undoubtedly led him in the faith—his grandmother and his mother.

How about you: do you have a younger person in the faith whose faith brings you joy? And it doesn’t have to be someone you’ve converted, it could be a child or grandchild, or someone who you mentor. We are all called to encourage one another in the faith, and not just family, but all of our brothers and sisters in Christ. As you do, I can tell you that you never know where it’ll lead.

Some of you have heard before how I grew up in the Lutheran Church, and how I would attend my grandparents’ church out in the country where my uncle taught Sunday School. What you may not know is that

the same pastor who preached to and taught us in my younger years became one of the two pastors at the church I attended in my undergrad years. Granted, it took a little bit of gentle reminding—pastors, as you well know, don’t always have the best of memories for everyone they’ve met—but then Pastor Cross remembered who I was. When he learned that I was considering the ministry, he encouraged me as often as he could. One Sunday after service, he took me into his office and showed me his library. He gave me permission to borrow any book I wanted during my time at the Seminary. Around the time I entered the Seminary, though, Pastor Cross passed away. A short time after I learned this, I was told that he had left me any books from his library that I wanted. So with the help of his assistant pastor, I got many of the books you’ll see in my office to this day.

That was Pastor Cross’ way of being a mentor in the faith. He remembered my grandmothers and encouraged me in the faith, and he left me his library. He did this to encourage me in the faith I had learned about by my parents and grandparents taking me to church in my younger years. Do any of you have similar experiences with someone older than you in the faith? If so, then pay attention to what Paul wrote to Timothy next.

#### Verse 2

“For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands, for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control. Therefore, do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God.”

Whether you are being mentored by an older man or an older woman, perhaps even in the LWML, Paul encourages not only Timothy, but you and me to “fan into flame the gift of God.” What is this gift? For Timothy, it was a gift of grace for carrying out his pastoral work. Yet you have also been given all that you need to fulfill your duties in each of your vocations, as well as to keep the faith.

Don’t neglect these gifts! As Paul reminds Timothy, you have been given these gifts by the saving work of God’s Son, Jesus Christ. Your mothers and grandmothers have brought you to church, or God has called you to your mother, the Church, through the proclamation of the Gospel—that good news that your sins are forgiven in Christ Jesus’ suffering and death on the cross. By that death, God has not only forgiven you your sins, but has “saved (you) and called (you) to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus.”

None of us, not you, not me, not our mothers or grandmothers, not Timothy, not even Paul has deserved God’s grace. You have been called into the light of the Gospel from the darkness of your sin—the end of which would have been your end in separation from God for all eternity. But, “before the ages began” God had a plan for your salvation. He would send His own beloved Son to bear the punishment of separation from Him for us; and that’s just what Jesus did.

To this day, we continue to be undeserving of the gifts of God’s grace. The only salvation that we have resides in Jesus Christ, His death and resurrection, and Him alone. There is no “plan B.” As we heard last week, while we don’t need the resurrection of anyone else, by His resurrection, Jesus proved Moses and the Prophets to be about Him—that He was and is God’s only Son who came to save us, just as it was written. And that is precisely why Paul encouraged Timothy not to be ashamed of the Gospel, but to follow the pattern. Just look at how Paul concludes the opening of his letter.

#### Verse 3

Paul reminds Timothy that he was made an apostle to bring “life and immortality to life through the gospel, for which (he was) appointed a preacher and an apostle and teacher, which is why (he suffered) as (he did). But (he was) not ashamed, for (he knew) whom (he had) believed.” And so Paul concludes, “Follow the pattern of sound words that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. By the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, guard the good deposit entrusted to you.”

None of us could or can save ourselves by anything we have done, are doing, or ever will do. But that is all taken care of in the Gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Now we live in His grace, continuing to follow the pattern of sound words. But what does that look like?

It looks like doing your God-given vocations; but it also looks like coming to church on a regular basis. After all, Paul encourages Timothy here—not to do good works as he does elsewhere—but to continue after the pattern of “sound words,” that is, hearing God’s Word.

That’s what any and every hero of the faith has done their whole lives. No matter which hero the author of Hebrews mentioned, each of them continued in God’s Word after He had called them. They not only heard it; they trusted it for their salvation. But while Moses and Abraham only heard of a Messiah to come, you and I know of that same Savior in whom Paul and Timothy believed and trusted, Jesus the Christ, the very Son of God. As we’ve been hearing all summer, we don’t know where the future will lead. Paul was writing at a time when literal imprisonment had either already happened to him or would happen, yet he encouraged Timothy not to be ashamed but to follow the pattern. Today, we are called to follow that same pattern. So, dear brothers and sisters in Christ, “By the Holy Spirit, who dwells within us, guard the good deposit entrusted to you” and follow the pattern. In Jesus’ Name. Amen.