

Imitating Great Faith

THE SAN DIEGO TRIBUNE NEWSPAPER IN THE UNITED STATES ran the following story about a woman and her bird. “One unusual reason for giving up smoking is that of a Rancho Santa Fe, California, woman who quit smoking because of her pet macaw. It developed a persistent cough. A veterinarian checked the macaw and determined that it didn’t have pneumonia or psittacosis, two of the possibilities that worried her. The final diagnosis was that the macaw was imitating the cough of its cigarette-smoking owner.” The owner thought the bird had a problem. She must have been very surprised and embarrassed. The bird was simply imitating her. When we spend time with others, we begin to imitate them just as the bird did. The Holy Spirit has a surprise for us in this study!

NOT THE MACAW. The book of Hebrews must have been a surprise to the readers to whom it was written. They worshipped together (Heb. 10:24-25) but not every week. They had been taught the word (Heb. 5:11-14). They had cared for and helped others (Heb. 6:10). They even suffered for Jesus! If they were alive today, they might have helped with the sound ministry, worked in the children’s Bible school, served on the leadership team, or ministered to prisoners. To many, this would seem as if the person is a great, dynamic Christian or even a church leader.

But the Holy Spirit says in Heb. 5:11-14 that they were just baby Christians. For twelve chapters God has warned them that their faith was weak or non-existent. This is one sign of a non-Christian or a baby Christian. The major symptoms of a baby Christian who has weak faith are disobedience and an unwillingness to endure suffering for Jesus (Heb. 11-12). The major symptom is that they do not know the Bible well enough to be teachers of it (Heb. 5:11-14).

... you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. (NKJV) Heb. 12-13

They needed to really know the Bible in depth. He said

they were “dull of hearing,” which means they were no longer interested in seeking to know God’s Word. Bible study was boring and social times had become more important. Today, we hear the same idea, “What we really need is fellowship and an opportunity to apply the Word.” Just like the Hebrews some churches are minimizing the teaching of the Word of Truth. It appears that their church was a social group. They came to church when they wanted to; they “studied the Bible” when they wanted to; they helped others and ministered in the church when they wanted to. God was no longer their focus and they thought Jesus was the reason for their problems. They did not understand that they were the problem.



The Holy Spirit has been calling them to respond. He has been calling them to have faith, to listen, to know the Bible, to gather with other Christians, and to endure suffering. But He is not finished. Now He calls them to a life of love and imitation.

SOMEONE TO LOVE. Early in Hebrews they had been praised for their love of other Christians or the saints. Now He says this,

Let brotherly love continue. (NKJV) Heb. 13:1

If they had been doing so well, why say this? Is it possible

they had become a social group loving those within their group? If so, the poor soul who was visiting and tried to “break-in” had great difficulty. This can happen anywhere. There is the initial warm greeting for new visitors, and later it becomes apparent the people in the church really do not care. They have their own group.

Whatever the reason, God wants us to know that we can do more. Here is His first encouragement.

Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some have unwittingly entertained angels. (NKJV) Heb. 13:2

The Greek word for “entertain” or “hospitality” in Heb. 13:2 is a combination of two words “love” and “stranger.” Together it means “love of strangers.” It does not mean only to entertain strangers by inviting them to your home or to a restaurant. The word includes more - not less. It does not refer to just social times. In ancient times it sometimes referred to “bed and breakfast.” Is that going “the extra mile?” Some have taught that this verse does not apply today, reasoning that since hotels, motels and inns did not exist in Jesus’ day, people today do not need to accommodate strangers. But a study of the Bible will reveal that inns did exist in Jesus’ day. Joseph and Mary looked for a place to stay in an inn (Luke 2:7)

but had to settle for a manger. Even the Good Samaritan left a man at an inn to be cared for (Luke 10:34). This passage does apply to us today. God calls us to go out of our way not just for our Christians friends but also for strangers - Christians or not.

OTHERS TO LOVE. God calls us to love prisoners too!

Remember the prisoners as if chained with them--those who are mistreated--since you yourselves are in the body also. (NKJV) Heb. 13:3

Have you ever been in prison and been chained to someone? Have you suffered torture with them day after day? That is the picture in the Greek. God calls us to constantly remem-

ber those who are in prison as if we are in prison with them and suffering with them. If we were in prison we would not be able to forget. Each day would be a constant reminder of our situation. Each day we would be talking with and seeing those who were in prison with us. That is the picture. We need to be constantly remembering prisoners.

That is the second group of folks we are called to love. Do you seek to include others - prisoners and strangers - into your group of Christian friends? That is God’s call.

LOVE SOMEONE NEAR. In the ancient world sexual activity outside of marriage was common. Pagan religious worship such as that practiced in the Roman and Greek temples encouraged prostitution and adultery, believing or claiming it brought them closer to their deity. But God calls Christians to a different standard.

Marriage is honorable among all, and the bed undefiled; but fornicators and adulterers God will judge. (NKJV) Heb. 13:4



He calls us to honor our spouse sexually by being sexually faithful! Put negatively, He calls us to not be “fornicators” nor “adulterers.” The Greek word for “fornicators” is PORNEIA. It refers to all kinds of sexual activity that does not involve one’s spouse; bestiality, homosexuality, lesbianism, and prostitution.

That includes all forms of sexual unfaithfulness. That was how the word was used in ancient times. God calls Christians to purity before marriage and within marriage.

DO NOT LOVE. How are you doing so far? Have you scored one hundred percent? If so, the next one will get most everyone, since God calls us to avoid being preoccupied with what we do not have.

Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, “I will never leave you nor forsake you.” So we may boldly say: “The LORD is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?” (NKJV) Heb. 13:5-6

There are few of us who do not worry about food, clothing, housing, and things we need in this life. As a result, it is easy to love money. Hugh Latimer who preached before King Edward VI is quoted as warning,

Take heed and beware of covetousness . . .

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What if I should say nothing else these three or four hours?

WATCH WHO YOU IMITATE. At first the next verse seems to be a different topic or another issue. But God is continuing to talk about our relationships: love for others, love for God and those we love to imitate. We all imitate someone. He or she may be someone at work, or someone in the church, such as your pastor, a godly friend, your mother or father, or some spiritual leader. Today we call it mentoring, discipleship, or modeling. Many of us do it without realizing it. Most of us need to do it! Baby Christians do it. They come to church and look at other Christians to see how they should act. They model someone. It is usually one of the leaders.

Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you, whose faith follow, considering the outcome of their conduct. (NKJV) Heb. 13:7

The Holy Spirit calls us to remember our leaders. But not just any leaders. He asks us to remember those leaders who taught us the Word of Truth and who were exceptional Christians. God is calling us to follow someone who has a proven Christian life. This is not just any leader. It is a leader who has taught you the Word. It is a leader whose life has been carefully evaluated over time. That is the meaning of the Greek word for “considering.”

Once we find this person, we are supposed to follow him or her. The Greek word for “follow” is MIMÉOMAI which means to “imitate” or “mimic.” One day I was listening to a man teaching Philippians 3:17. He warned his listeners to

not follow several people in his congregation. He explained that the apostle Paul did not mean that they should follow him but Jesus. At that point the teacher went on to say that we should not follow anyone but Jesus. Now that sounds spiritual but, my friend, that is not biblical. Both the apostle and the Holy Spirit in Hebrews said that we are to follow someone. We are to follow someone’s faith! We are to follow someone’s life to encourage our own spiritual walk and faith.

CONCLUSION. Babies learn to walk by mimicing mommy and daddy. A baby Christian learns to live a life of faith by following another Christian. The only question is how good is the model? If someone mimic, you or if you mimic someone else, how good is the copy going to be?

In the British Museum, a Greek writing tablet is on display. Its date of origin is earlier than the Christian era and it is the equivalent of a child’s writing tablet. A headline has been written on it at the top by a master. The student then had to write the second line by attempting to trace the master’s line. Then each following line was reproduced by copying the previous one. Each new line became worse and worse. Each new line differed more and more from the master’s line.

That is happening in the church. Often the person we are following is not someone we should follow. Hebrews 13:1-7 gives us a pattern for selecting someone to follow. All of us are following; the question is whom are you following? God wants to follow a leader who has taught the Bible. Does he or she know their Bible or only know about the Bible? Now that eliminates many people. The person must also be someone whom you have carefully evaluated. Does he or she model love for strangers, prisoners, and the brethren? Has he or she been a faithful spouse and depends on God to meet their needs? Does he or she have great faith? Great faith is obedient and is willing to suffer for Jesus. Come and imitate a man or woman of great faith and become a Christian whose faith is focused on Jesus!

