

## **Like This**

**By Steven Harper**

It has been said by some that imitation is the sincerest form of flattery. That is true in many ways, whether the imitator knows it or not. Children often imitate their parents, and their imitation is often how they learn when very young. As the children get older, they begin imitating others — for good or bad — and their behavior is often a reflection [and imitation] of those around them or those whom they admire.

Imitation is a good thing, therefore, if the one we imitate is good. But there is the catch: To be good, we must imitate what is good. It is only logical that if we imitate that which is evil, we will not be looked upon favorably by most men, and certainly not by God. If we desire God's favor, then, we must "not imitate what is evil, but what is good" (3John 11).

With this in mind, then, let us consider a few people that we would do well to imitate. If we follow the pattern of these individuals, we can guarantee we will be in God's favor!

Obey Like Noah. Noah is a familiar character in Old Testament history; his faith before God is one that stands out among men, especially the men of his time, when it was said "the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (Gen. 6:5). In that world it was said of Noah, "Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord" (Gen. 6:8), and, "Noah was a just man, perfect in his generations" (Gen. 6:9). Noah, it appears, stood out from the majority of mankind in that he was just and righteous. That found God's favor!

But we should also note something else about Noah — something we need to imitate. When God told Noah He was bringing a flood upon the earth to destroy it, and that he should build an ark, we find the following simple statements about Noah that are worthy of imitation: "Thus Noah did; according to all that God commanded him, so he did" (Gen. 6:22), and, "Noah did according to all that the Lord commanded him" (Gen. 7:5).

You see, the faith Noah had that was so noteworthy (Heb. 11:8) was a faith that moved him to obey all the Lord had commanded him. That stands in stark contrast to much of what is called 'faith' today, where men do whatever they please and then claim God approves because 'God is such a loving God' or 'It doesn't matter what you do, as long as you're sincere.' Friends and brethren, the faith that pleases God is a faith like Noah's. Obey like Noah!

Repent Like Nineveh. We may remember the story of Jonah, where God commanded Jonah, "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry out against it; for their wickedness has come up before Me" (Jon. 1:2), but Jonah rebelled and tried to flee from the presence of the Lord. We may remember how he fled to a ship headed to Tarshish (Jon. 1:3), and the Lord created a tempest at sea to get his attention (Jon. 1:4ff), and how Jonah was tossed overboard and ended up in the belly of a fish prepared for him by God (Jon. 1:15-17). We may also remember that Jonah came to his senses and after he was back on dry land and God commanded him again to go to Nineveh, Jonah went this time (Jon. 3:1-4).

We don't know what Jonah really expected, but when the message got to the king, he commanded all people [and all animals] be covered in sackcloth [a sign of great mourning], and said, "Let every one turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands. Who can tell if God will turn and relent, and turn away from His fierce anger, so that we may not perish?" (Jon. 3:5-9).

Their efforts were beneficial, for we then read, "Then God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God relented from the disaster that He had said He would bring upon them, and He did not do it" (Jon. 3:10). Needless to say, God looked upon their actions favorably!

Let us follow the example of the Ninevites and repent without hesitation when necessary. When we are confronted with a sin in our lives, we do ourselves no good by trying to

make excuses, shifting the blame, or denying wrongdoing. Real sin demands real repentance, and if we seek God's favor, let us not forget that we all have sinned (Rom. 3:23), and that God "commands all men everywhere to repent" (Acts 17:30). A heart that desires to sin no longer is what pleases God. Repent like Nineveh!

Study Like the Bereans. When the apostle Paul was run out of Thessalonica for teaching Jesus as the Christ, he went to nearby Berea and began teaching there (Acts 17:1-10). When he went into the synagogue and began teaching, it is said that the people in the audience there "were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so" (Acts 17:11).

Keep in mind that this is Paul speaking — the same Paul who was chosen by Jesus and inspired by the Holy Spirit to speak! The fact is, the Bereans did not simply take Paul at his word, but "searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so"! They were not going to take his word for it; they went to God's word to verify it. Now, we know, of course, that what Paul spoke was God's word — but they didn't know that. They knew the only way to verify a man's words were true was to check them against what they knew to be true: God's written word.

Friends and brethren, this is what we must do, too! There are many men out there who will claim that what they speak is from God, but how will we know? With our souls and our salvation at stake, why would we take any man's word without verifying it? Your soul is simply too valuable to do anything less than what they did. Don't just take a man's word for it; study like the Bereans!

Love Like Jesus. I find it very telling that Jesus Himself once said, "Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends" (John 15:13), and then went out and exceeded that love by laying down His life for His enemies! Truly, the love of Jesus was great, for He was willing to die for people who were unworthy of His life, much less His death. But God's word reminds us, "By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us" (1John 3:16).

This is one of those imitations we really don't have a choice about whether we want to do it or not. Right before Jesus described 'the greatest love,' He commanded the disciples, "This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you" (John 15:12). Paul would later write to the brethren in Ephesus, "And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma" (Eph. 5:2). Imitation of Jesus in this is not an option, and not something we choose to do when it is easy or convenient. Do we think it was either easy or convenient for Jesus to demonstrate His love for us as He did?

Loving like Jesus means we love those unworthy of love; it means we love others when they do not love us; it means we love others without holding anything back —giving our lives, if necessary. It is when we love as Jesus loved that the world will know we are His disciples (John 13:34-35). If we do not love as Jesus loved, what we suppose they will think of us? Love like Jesus!

As Paul said, "Imitate me, just as I also imitate Christ" (1Cor. 11:1).