

*“Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith.”* Hebrews 13: 7

So who is it for you? This verse asks you to remember your leaders who spoke the word of God to you. It asks you to consider the outcome of their way of life. It asks you to imitate their faith. So who did you think of? Who has brought you closer to Jesus? Who still influences you to keep the Christian faith? Take a moment to think about the person or persons that have had the biggest impact on you spiritually. Think about what they did to point you in Christ’s direction. Offer a prayer of thanks for them.

How long has it been since you really gave that some thought? You know, it might be a pretty good idea to take time to tell that person you just thought about—if it’s possible—just tell them what they’ve meant to you in your life of faith. Imagine what it would be like to receive a card or a phone call like that: “You are responsible for bringing me closer to my Savior, Jesus Christ!” If you can make that happen for someone, why not do it?

It’s difficult for me to create a short list of people who have influenced my faith. I have been blessed to have many strong, faithful examples to imitate. It starts with my parents, who taught me Christian love and forgiveness and put me in places like church and the classroom where I would hear the Word of God daily. The Lord blessed me with an all-star team of pastoral mentors starting with my vicarage days, to show me what faithful ministry is. To that list I would add my Lutheran teachers and professors, along with other family members and friends who have shown me something about Christ’s love, and given me something to imitate.

Time for some more remembering. Whoever you thought about a moment ago—what were some concrete, specific things that they did to push you God’s way? This is a very important question. What actions did they take, and how did those actions affect your life? One of the easiest ways I know of to share your faith with someone is to remember what another Christian did for you, and then do the same thing. That’s what imitating is, after all. They do it, then you try it. That’s how we learn. When the author of Hebrews writes, “Consider the outcome of their lives and imitate their faith,” he’s saying, do for someone else what your Christ-like leader did for you. Imitate the things they did that made a difference for you. And in that way you’ll make a difference for someone else.

Now at this point we need to be cautiously aware of two things. Number One: We must take care that in remembering our leaders, considering the outcome of their lives and imitating their faith, we do not end up worshipping a hero that is not Jesus. This can be very subtle. Few people I know actually worship other humans, but we do have a tendency to elevate those who’ve been good to us. We can put people, even Christian people, on pedestals in small and large ways, and of course, this is a mistake. There is no other faith to imitate than faith that confesses: “All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God; and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.” (Romans 3: 23) Every Christian is a sinner forgiven, and the Christian always points others to Christ, not to him or herself. That is the faith we are to imitate.

The second caution is this: though we are encouraged to imitate the faith of our Christian leaders, it must not be an imitation of faith. In other words, our faith must be our own, and it must be sincere. It must go beyond doing things just because others have done them, with little sense of why. No one can believe for you. If your mother was pious and faithful, that's a wonderful blessing. Thank God for it. But her faith cannot save you. If your pastor taught you the Christian faith and was there for you in difficult times, that was God's intention for you to benefit from such ministry. Praise God for it. But your pastor's faith cannot save you. *Your* faith is what matters, and it must not be an imitation of true faith, or it will do you no good. True faith confesses, "I cannot by my own reason, or strength, believe in Jesus Christ my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Spirit has called me by the gospel, enlightened me with his gifts; given me holiness and kept me in the one true faith." Do not confuse an imitation of faith—doing some good things every now and then—with true faith, which clings for all its worth to a crucified and risen Savior and stakes everything, life after death included, on what Jesus has done.

"Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith." Today we have remembered. Will you imitate the faith and love of the Christ-like people God has placed in your path? Will you follow their example and point others to Jesus? Consider the outcome of their way of life:

A missionary traveling through the interior of China once told a group of natives the story of Jesus for the first time. When he had finished, someone said,

"Oh yes, we knew him; he used to live here."

But the missionary said, "No; I'm talking about another person who lived centuries ago in another land."

"But we did know him," the man insisted. "He lived in this village."

The disagreement continued until the people took the missionary out to their village cemetery. There they pointed to a grave, marked with a cross, which belonged to a Christian doctor who had lived, served, and died in their community.

Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Imitate their faith. Show Jesus to the village in which you live.