



Imitation

Rod Thomas

Therefore I urge you to imitate me.

—1 Corinthians 4:16 NIV

My mother decided to disciple me and my siblings while our father was away at work. I dreaded these Bible lessons at around 11:30 a.m. each weekday when I was a preschooler because I was more interested in watching television.

But as I got older, I changed my mind. One day, as I watched mother

prepare to teach us for one of our daily Bible lessons, I walked up to her and told her, “Momma, when I grow up, I want to be like you. I want to wake up early, drink coffee, and read my Bible just like you.”

Of course she laughed, and as I grew in the faith, I struggled to imitate her: the way she sat in the chair calmly and how she prayed over verses.

My family consisted of my parents and two brothers, Ryan and Richard. Richard was the youngest, and as he learned to walk and talk, Ryan and I got frustrated and impatient with him. We just did not like Richard following us around all the time, copying our every move, playing with our toys. We just wanted to be left alone.

I can laugh as I look back on all of this now because we were so young, but every day Ryan and I would complain to Momma that “Richard won’t stop copying us.”

Little brothers and sisters, as a process of their personality development, will more than likely imitate their older brothers and sisters. I have several years of experience working in Christian education and in the public education system, and this generally holds true.

Recently, our classroom has received a new student with autism from the civil war-torn country

of Syria. When we first met him, he had only been in the country for three days, and so he was very frightened. However, as the weeks have passed, TJ* has shown a capacity for learning very quickly through imitation. TJ’s primary means of learning how to speak and write the English language is by imitating his teachers and peers. Because I have worked the closest with TJ, he imitates almost every word I say. In addition, one of our nonverbal students, Martin,* has started to communicate verbally, and he too has chosen to imitate my words.

I have noticed an improvement in my students’ classwork. As for my brother Richard, he has followed in my footsteps by continuing his theological education in seminary and in his work as a scholar/activist. There is a joy and satisfaction in knowing that one has made such a positive impact in the life of others.

What I have learned from my brother Richard and my students is consistent with what the Bible teaches: discipleship is imitation, and providing a good word to model can be life giving. All of this started because my mother was led by the Holy Spirit to get up each morning, drink her coffee, and use her yellow highlighter to mark all over her worn, brown Bible. **END**

*names have been changed

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