

**“LEAD THE WAY, SET AN EXAMPLE.”**

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**First Christian Reformed Church**

**February 16, 2025, 10:30 AM**

**Scripture Texts: I Timothy 4:12, 15-16**

### **Introduction.**

I want to talk to you about your theme verse for Cadets this year. You have been talking about leading the way by setting a good example and in I Timothy 4 the Apostle Paul tells us how we can do that.

The Apostle Paul wrote this letter to a young man named Timothy who is around 30 years old which in those days was considered young. Paul is encouraging him to set a good example for those around him, both Christians and non-Christians.

These verses apply not just *to every spiritual leader but to every Christian*. It applies to husbands and fathers, wives and mothers, brothers and sisters, bosses and managers, teachers and coaches. What *must* be true for our leaders, *ought* to be true for all of us. All of us are always an example to someone. Someone is always watching us and always looking up to us, or we are watching and looking up to someone.

You can lead the way by setting an example if you are 5, 10, 15, 25, 50 or 80. You can be a follower of Jesus at any age, at home, at school, at church. Paul is saying start setting an example even when you are young.

Let me be clear about one reason why we don't do this. We don't do it to earn our salvation or earn God's grace and favor toward us. We don't do this to earn our way into heaven.

We are not saved by our works, by our being good, doing good, trying harder than others. Only Jesus can save us, only the grace of God through faith and believing in Jesus. If we say we believe in Jesus, that we have faith in Jesus, but all our actions are the opposite of Jesus and what Jesus did and what Jesus said, what then? Then we are liars, we are hypocrites.

If a tree says it is an apple tree, but it doesn't have any apples, then it is lying. If we say we follow Jesus, but our actions aren't like Jesus, then we are deceiving ourselves and others.

Our actions don't save us, they show we are saved. Our actions show we are becoming who we already are in Christ. You have been saved by grace, so act that way.

Our faith bears fruit no matter what age we are. The question is what kind of fruit are we showing, good fruit or bad fruit? What kind of example are you?

Those of you who are in your teens or twenties I want you to hear what Paul is saying. Even at your age you can serve as a model of Christian maturity. Don't surrender to other people's low expectations, and don't give them any reason to look down on you because of your behavior.

The best way to win respect is not asking for it or demanding it, but by acting in a way that wins respect.

Set an example. Surprise people by your example. Be one of those about whom someone would say "he is mature beyond his years." Your youth is no excuse for ungodliness or spiritual immaturity. Right now, today, God calls you to set an example of godly character and maturity.

### **Lead the way, Set an example.**

Paul lists five parts of godly character, five ways to set an example, *speech, conduct, love, faith and purity.*

#### ***Speech.***

Lead the way by setting an example in what you say, what comes out of your mouth.

Do words come out of your mouth that shouldn't? Are you careful with your words? Do you talk too much? Are your words clean? Are your words kind to others? Do you tell the truth? If someone says something mean to you do you say something mean back? Do you look for opportunities to give a compliment, to notice something good and say it?

In the Cadet litany we said, Keep your mouth free of perversity; keep corrupt talk far from your lips (Proverbs 4:24).

**Ephesians 4:29** Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear.

**Colossians 3:8** You must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth.

In the OT the young boy Samuel began to serve the Lord and to speak for God, his words were good and pleasing to God. He set an example.

There is also a bad example of a big group of boys who made fun of and mocked one of God's holy prophets Elisha, and God punished them severely.

The words that come out of your mouth say something about your relationship with Jesus. And so to the words that come out of our fingers as we type in Facebook or a text message or email. Our words matter and they set an example and say what is in our hearts to all who hear.

Especially remember the Ten Commandments that we are never to take God's name in vain, or to use God or Jesus as curse words.

It is hard to watch our tongue and guard our tongue. Ask Jesus to help you keep you tongue from sin and ask Him to help you show you are following Jesus. And when words come out that are sin, show you are following Jesus by saying you are sorry and asking forgiveness.

### ***Conduct.***

Lead the way by setting an example in the way you act and behave at home, at school, in the neighborhood, with friends, at church.

Again in the Cadet litany we read, in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you (Matthew 7:12).

**Colossians 3:23** Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, 24 knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ.

When? Always.

Where? Everywhere.

Why? Because someone is watching.

If some kids are doing something wrong, do we join in and go along with the group? If you see someone bullying or picking on someone do you join them or do you stand up for that person?

Do we return evil for evil? If your brother or sister bothers you do you push back? If your parents ask you to do something, do you do it? If the boss tells you to do something do you grumble and complain?

Many who say they believe in Jesus still live like everyone else in the world. Do our actions match what we say we believe, do they match Jesus' actions?

Set an example at home, at school, on the playground, at the soccer game, on the road, at the grocery. Set an example at church, in worship. Be present, be engaged, be willing to serve, to help, to contribute. Lead the way, set an example.

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were young Israelites, probably teenagers or early 20s, faced with a choice to bow down to an idol or be thrown into a fiery furnace. They did the right thing regardless of losing their life.

Remember the young boy who gave up his lunch to Jesus, not knowing if he would have any food to eat. Selflessly giving and serving others. Who can you show kindness to? Are you helpful to your mom and dad, to your brother or sister? Set an example by doing the right thing and making good choices.

***Love.***

Lead the way by setting an example in your love. Love is a defining trait for a Christian.

**I John 4:7-8** Let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God because God is love.

**I Corinthians 16:14** Let all that you do be done in love.

Why does love matter so much to God? Because love is at the center of all that God has done for us (Romans 5:8).

What is love? Love is not just a feeling or emotion but something that shows itself in our actions. The ultimate measure of love is not what you feel for others but what you do for them. It is putting others first, ahead of ourselves. Thinking about what is good or best for others more than ourselves.

Loving others can be hard because of our sin and their sin. Can you be kind to someone who isn't?

**Luke 6:27-28** Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, 28 bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you.

Remember the Good Samaritan who helped a man beat up by the side of the road, he stopped, he cared, he even helped him financially. Do you see a need and help meet it?

Remember Ruth, who Pastor Zac has been preaching about, how she loved her mother-in-law Naomi, through her loyalty and sacrificial care.

Daniel showed his love and loyalty to God by not compromising his beliefs.

Lead the way and set an example with actions that show love like Jesus.

### ***Faith.***

Lead the way by setting an example in your faith, in your trust in God.

In the Cadet litany we said, showing our Christian faith by living by faith, not by sight. Our confidence is in God, not in people, or circumstances.

Do you ever get nervous or worried or anxious about something, maybe at home or at school or at your job? Worried about a test, an interview, a doctor's appointment, something you have to do that's hard?

The Bible says, "to not worry about anything, but to pray about everything..." (Philippians 4:6). Living by faith means I take my worries to God and pray about them and trust Him to help me through them.

Faith is believing in Jesus and trusting God no matter what, even when it is hard.

Remember those four men who were carrying their paralyzed friend to Jesus and they had to cut a hole in the roof to get him to Jesus.

**Luke 5:18-20** Some men were bringing on a bed a man who was paralyzed, and they were seeking to bring him in and lay him before Jesus, 19 but finding no way to bring him in, because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and let him down with his bed through the tiles into the midst before Jesus. 20 And when he *saw their faith*, he said, "Man, your sins are forgiven you."

Show your faith, wear your faith on your sleeve. Grow in your faith. Confess your unbelief and ask God to help you increase in faith.

Your faith is like a muscle, it grows stronger when you use it and build it up, by reading your Bible, praying, worshipping God. You can't be strong in your faith without prayer and your Bible, so don't go through life without them. Pray when wake up, before you eat, before you sleep.

There are several examples of young people in the Bible acting in ways that showed their faith in God and honored God. Young David standing up to Goliath, young Esther risking her life for others, young Mary humbly accepting God's will for her life.

Remember Peter when he got out of the boat to walk on the water toward Jesus. And then when he got scared and started to sink, Jesus rescued him, but his faith grew stronger after that.

Set an example by not worrying or being anxious, but having faith and trusting Jesus.

## ***Purity.***

Lead the way by setting an example in purity, both moral and spiritual integrity.

The litany said, blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God (Matthew 5:8).

Purity means to have moral character. God tells us in His Word to “be holy as I am holy” (1 Peter 1:16). Morals are the rights and wrongs of life. It used to be clear what was right and wrong, but it is not so clear anymore.

Do you have low expectations or high expectations for yourself?

What do you think the culture, the world we live in expects of you?

What do all the TV shows, sitcoms, movies, all the music, what does it expect of you?

Does it expect you to set an example in purity?

In the face of such low expectations, the Bible calls us to the highest expectations.

Purity keeps your mind, heart, and body away from those things that would cause you to sin.

Protect your mind and body. Keep mind and body clean, with things of God.

**Philippians 4:8** Whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.

Think about what you think about.

**I Corinthians 6:19-20** Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, 20 for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.

Joseph in the OT set a powerful example when he was being strongly tempted to sin against God, he feared God more than whatever would happen, he ran away, and it cost him, but he kept his purity.

Paul wrote this letter to Timothy who lived in Ephesus, one of the most spiritually and morally dangerous cities in that time, filled with pagan immorality and idolatry. Not unlike our world. Paul urged Timothy to set an example for purity in that immoral city.

Set an example, keep your hands, heart and mind pure. Look away from anything you are not supposed to see. Look away, flee from evil. Remember the Holy Spirit dwells in all believers helping them and enabling them to flee from sin and evil and be holy before God.

**II Timothy 2:22** Flee from youthful lusts.

### **Implications and application.**

God would not demand what you could not do. You are indwelt by the Holy Spirit of God, the Holy Spirit who is committed to your holiness. It is His joy to make you holy. It is His delight to help you set an example.

**II Corinthians 3:5** Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as coming from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God.

God cares about “who” you are more than “what” you say you are! Be an example of Jesus to others through the Holy Spirit’s power in you.

There is someone out there who is watching, they don’t know Jesus, but they are looking to see what Jesus is like. They will decide about Jesus by looking at you. Lead the way, set an example in speech, conduct, love, faith and purity. Show them Jesus in you.

**Prayer:** Holy Father, as the Apostle Paul said, who is sufficient or worthy for these things? We know apart from you we can do nothing, but through you and by you all things are possible. Send your Holy Spirit upon these young men and all of us, fulfill all your purposes for us and build your church for your glory. Your kingdom come, your will be done. For the sake of Jesus and in His name. Amen.