

SERMON NOTES

SERIES: Exodus: Set Free, Live Free

TITLE: The Principle of Imitation

SCRIPTURE: Exodus 34.29-35

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We are in a series on the Book of Exodus from the Old Testament. Why study this book? Exodus is the Old Testament story of the salvation of God's people that points forward to the great salvation that comes to us by faith in Jesus.

When you were growing up, think about who you wanted to be like. Was it a family member? Or a Disney princess? Or a sports star? Or a politician? You probably followed their every move. That you tried to talk like them, act like them, think like them, and even be them. And sometimes, you'd even look ridiculous in your attempts to imitate your heroes.

The funny thing is, those desires haven't gone away. We may have dignified them a little bit, but the same principle is at play when you get older. We do it in leadership, in finance, in marriage, in parenting, and in nearly every arena of life. We all have a desire to emulate others so that we might be, at least in our own minds, a more full version of ourselves. And all of this adds up as proof that there's something buried deep within the human spirit that seeks to copy and to imitate.

But why? What is the reason that we all tend toward this? And are there better ways to imitate, and less healthy ways to imitate? What are the mechanics behind our inclination to emulate?

Enter Moses.

At the end of Exodus 32-34, Moses comes down the mountain, and his face is glowing and shining brightly. The people of Israel can barely look at him because of how radiant he is. Why? Because he has been with God. And in his being with God, he started to imitate God and radiate with glory like God does. And it wasn't just a one-time thing. Moses kept going back on the mountain to be with God, and he kept coming down from the mountain mirroring God's splendor.

And the fact that this story closes Exodus 32-34 is instructive. It's an important reminder to us as readers and to Israel as God's people that they were called to imitation and reflection like Moses.

When they saw Moses, they thought, "This is like God is in our midst." And then thought, "Oh wait, he is! That's what the tabernacle is about." And finally, although they failed at this, "That's what we're supposed to be about too." Just as God's presence dwelled in the midst of Israel in the tabernacle, so Israel was supposed to be God's presence in the midst of all the nations. They were meant to be a tabernacle for all peoples, showing off God's powerful presence and mercy. And all of these things are a reminder of why the imitation principle works:

You become what you behold.

That's how God set it up in Eden. He made us to be his image-bearers, to mirror his creative power and love throughout his world. Sin has messed this up, but Jesus has redeemed this principle in the lives of those who follow him. And we are now called to behold the glory of God in Jesus, and in doing so, we will become like him.

If you've ever felt that you don't like what you're becoming, the Bible's assessment is that it is ultimately an issue of what you're beholding. And that lasting transformation happens when we behold Jesus (2 Corinthians 3:18).

For Discussion —

1. How do ideas like Scripture reading and personal prayer fit in with this "you become what you behold" idea?
2. What are places in your own life where you can sense this principle at work in a negative or distracting way (i.e. the news example)?
3. If you had to explain the big idea of this message to someone who missed it, how would you paraphrase it in a few sentences?
4. Who is someone you know who you can tell that they have been with God? They radiate with his love and grace, and you know it's a result of them spending personal time with him.