

# A Man to Imitate

by Tim Conway

---

*In this sermon, Tim Conway emphasizes the importance of imitation in the Christian life, highlighting the example of John the Baptist and Jesus' ministries, and encouraging listeners to imitate Christ by seeing Him in others and striving to become like Him.*

**Duration:** 1:03:08

**Scripture:** John 3:22

**Topics:** "Gods Sovereignty", "Christ Centered"

---

## Description

The sermon focuses on imitating John the Baptist by having right thoughts about the sovereignty of God, recognizing our unworthiness, and keeping Christ at the center of our minds and hearts. John's example teaches us to find joy in God's sovereignty, humility in knowing who we are, and a Christ-centered focus in all aspects of life.

---

## Transcript

The title of my sermon this morning, A Man to Imitate. I'd like you to turn to John 3. And know the man to imitate is not Nicodemus. It's another John 3. A man to imitate.

And I'd like to begin reading in v. 22. I'm reading from the English Standard Version. After this, Jesus and His disciples went into the Judean countryside.

And He remained there with them and was baptizing. John also was baptizing at Enon near Salem because water was plentiful there. And people were coming and being baptized.

For John had not yet been put in prison. Now, a discussion arose between some of John's disciples and a Jew over purification. And they came to John and said to him, Rabbi, he who is with you across the Jordan to whom you bore witness, look, he is baptizing and all are going to him.

John answered, A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven. You yourselves bear me witness that I said, I am not the Christ, but I have been sent before Him. The one who has the bride is the bridegroom.

The friend of the bridegroom who stands and hears Him rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice. Therefore, this joy of mine is now complete. He must increase, but I must decrease.

Now brethren, what I hope to accomplish by my sermon this morning is to put before you the example of certain men that you should not imitate and the example of one man you should strive to imitate. Imitation. What is that? What is it? The greatest form of flattery.

That probably isn't a textbook definition though, brother. Imitation is basically the act of becoming like another, right? Copying what somebody else is like. Another is the pattern and you strive to become a copy of that pattern.

And you know what? Imitation is no small matter in the Christian life. Not if you read your New Testament right. Now brethren, I want you to think with me here.

In fact, right now, turn in your Bibles to 2 Corinthians 3.18 and I know a lot of you are familiar with this verse, but I want you to see it again. 1 Corinthians 3.18 because I want to show you something that maybe you really haven't comprehended before now. Or at least, you know this.

I have a feeling all of you know what I'm about to tell you, but maybe you haven't really felt the weight of how important this is. 2 Corinthians 3.18 We all with unveiled face, and that is a comparison to Moses who had a veiled face. And who's we all? Not all of us without any limitations.

He's speaking to the Corinthian believers. And he's saying we all. He's including himself.

He's speaking about Christians here. As a Christian beholds the glory of the Lord, we are being transformed into the same image. What image? Into the glory of the Lord.

Into the image of the Lord. We're transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.

So, what happens is this. How is a Christian transformed into the image of Christ? And by the way, that's what God is in the business of doing. God doesn't just save us from the guilt of our sin.

A lot of people have this idea, well, you get saved, you don't go to hell. Well, yeah, that's true. That's really good.

I don't argue. That is a real positive point to being saved. But it goes beyond that.

That's the negative. That's what we've been delivered from the guilt. We've been forgiven.

But on the other hand, we are being transformed into the very image of Christ Himself. And in fact, when our life is done here, when we see Him as He is, we're going to be transformed right into that image. But right now as Christians, as we behold Him, we are being transformed degree by degree into that image.

And so you see that. So we could make this huge case. Well, we need to go to our Bibles and we need to study what Christ looks like.

We need to see the Lord. We need to behold Him. And as we behold Him, God supernaturally sends His Spirit with all this power to unleash in the life of the Christian as we look at Christ to transform us into the same image.

And indeed, that's what that text teaches. But listen, what I want you to see is just how radically important it is that it's just not from the pages of this book that we behold the glory of the Lord and are transformed

into that image of the Lord by degrees. It's as we see Christ in one another.

And maybe you haven't ever realized just how much the New Testament bears witness to that. Brethren, don't turn to all these. In fact, right now, turn back to John 4. Turn back to John 4. And while you're doing that, you're getting there.

Listen to this. Don't turn to these. Just hear these.

The Apostle Paul says to the Corinthians, chapter 4, verse 16, I urge you then, be imitators of me. Imitation. 1 Corinthians 11-1 to the same disciple.

Be imitators of me as I am of Christ. To the Philippians, he says, brothers, join in imitating me. And keep your eyes on who? On Christ? That's not what he says.

Keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us. So, we're told that as we keep our eyes on Christ, we're transformed into His image. And yet at the same time, we are told to be imitating those who have Christ's likeness in their life.

Keep our eyes on them. To the Thessalonians, he says, you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the Word in much affliction with the joy of the Holy Spirit. Again, in the second Thessalonian letter, you yourselves know how you ought to imitate us.

Hebrews 6.12, the writer there says that we should be imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises. And again, Hebrews, remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the Word of God. Consider the outcome of the way of their life and imitate their faith.

Think with me, brethren. Peter tells elders to be an example to the flock, doesn't he? And what's an example? An example is that which is to be imitated. In other words, set yourself up to be imitated if you're elders.

Paul tells Timothy to set the believers an example in speech, conduct, faith, purity. The Thessalonian believers were said to be an example to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. And Paul tells Titus to show himself in all respect to be a model of good works.

To be an example, brethren, to be a model is to be one that others can imitate. Whereas, you know, brethren, isn't it amazing how we have a natural inclination to imitate those that we're around? You know, I think right now about my aunt. My aunt, born and raised in Michigan.

You visit my aunt today. She lives in Atlanta. And she has a southern drawl in her speech that almost exceeds most of the people that were born in Atlanta.

Well, how did that happen? She wasn't born with that. She got around people. We have a natural inclination.

In fact, so much, brethren, that aren't we told to get the leaven out of the church? Why? Because a little leaven leavens a whole lump. What does that mean? That means we tend to imitate what we see around us. In fact, these Corinthians were told do not be deceived.

Bad company ruins good morals. Right? Brethren, imitation. Imitation.

Very important in the Christian life. And it's very important that we don't have in our midst those that we shouldn't be imitating. When bad stuff comes in the church, it needs to be purified.

It needs to be corrected. It needs to be dealt with. And if people aren't willing to deal with it, then there is biblical warrant to put that leaven out from amongst us.

So example, I take it you see it. Brethren, what I realize here in all this importance of imitation is that you and I, we grow into the likeness of the Lord, not just as we see the Lord here, but as we see the Lord here. As we see the Lord being modeled in the lives.

As we see one another setting ourselves to be a model of faith, a model of good works, in all respects, in conduct, in purity, in speech. Well, what I want us to look at today is one man who is a tremendous example and a group of other men that we don't want to imitate. We don't want them to be an example to us.

So, let's look at our account in John 3. I had you turn to John 4, but it's actually John 3. Now, brethren, this account here in John 3, it's very unique. And it's unique because there's only a short window of time. Who can tell me when Jesus' ministry was inaugurated? When did He publicly come on the scene? When did He start gathering disciples to Himself and revealing Himself publicly as the Christ? What was the point at which His ministry was inaugurated? What's that? At John's baptism.

And what happened after the baptism of John? Immediately after. The Spirit of God descended on Him. And in John 1, John says, He's the one I saw the Spirit descend upon.

You know what? There was a very short window of time between when Jesus was baptized of John, the Spirit came upon Him, He was led out into the wilderness immediately tempted, and He came back and He began His ministry. And there was a very short window of time between Jesus having started His ministry and when John was put in prison. And so you have this short window when both men were in full-blown operation, in full-blown ministry.

And that's what we see here. These special days. Brethren, can you imagine? There's talk and there's rumor all around.

The Christ. Elijah. The Prophet.

They were coming out there. There was rumor spreading throughout the land. And now, there's not only one guy out there preaching and baptizing, I mean, there's another one! I mean, what in the world? What's going on? God has been silent for 400 years.

And now we not only have one Prophet out there, we have two! God is at work. God is at hand. And so you had this short window.

Very unique time when both John and Jesus were baptized. It's also very unique because Matthew, Mark, and Luke don't tell us anything about it. In Matthew, Mark, and Luke, as soon as Jesus' ministry is inaugurated and is baptized and the Spirit descends upon Him, next thing you hear about John in all three of the synoptics, he's in prison already.

The Gospel of John is the only one that shows us into this time frame, into this very unique window. And brethren, two companies, right? Two companies doing the same thing. Both attracting crowds.

And so the setting is kind of put in place for there to be rivalry. Isn't it amazing? We talked last week about the devices of the devil. And he's out there seeking to divide.

Isn't it amazing that in the one picture that we get of the time of overlap in these ministries, the followers of John seem to be stirred up with a spirit of jealousy and competitiveness. So let's look out. Check out v. 25.

John 3. Now, a discussion arose between some of John's disciples and a Jew over purification. And brethren, here we get introduced to the folks we do not want to imitate. But notice how they're introduced to us.

A discussion over purification. You almost wonder what in the world does that have to do with anything? Why would the Gospel of John, the writer, John the Apostle, why does he need to give us this information? But I want you to notice something. Notice what the discussion about purification leads into.

What does it lead into? It leads into v. 26. And v. 26 starts with what? And. It starts with a conjunction.

I mean, the two thoughts are connected. The disciples of John have this conversation about purification and they came to John and said to him, Rabbi, He who is with you across the Jordan to whom you bore witness, look, He's baptizing and all are going to Him. Well, you get the idea that whatever they were talking about with regards to purification led them to run right to John.

I mean, it almost seems disjointed at first glance. I don't believe John would have included this almost seemingly unrelated fact about purification that did actually have a connection. And all I can figure is probably it seems that something in the discussion about purification led John's followers to become stirred up and jealous over the success of Jesus.

Isn't that what we get? I mean, they're running to John and they're saying, look, the one that was with you over there, look at Him, He's out there and all these people are going to Him and He's baptizing. And we can tell by the way John answers. They're not saying, hallelujah! Jesus, the one that you wanted all the attention to go to, it's actually going to Him.

This is great. By the way John answers. And by the fact that these guys themselves didn't follow Jesus.

And so, what could have happened? Look, I don't know exactly what happened in purification, but I know this. I've just recently been reading through Leviticus, Numbers, and I see that under the Mosaic law, there was purification that was made by water. The Levites had to be purified with water.

Can you imagine a Jew looking on and saying, John's baptizing, now Jesus is baptizing. They're trying to fit it into their old covenant thinking. What can this be about? They're dipping Him in water and pulling Him out.

This must be some symbolism of purification or maybe this is some Nazarite thing or maybe this is obviously false religions and cultic followings and that kind of thing. There was no mystery in that day. There were all sorts of false religions.

There are always some people doing novel things and they're trying to figure out why would these guys be doing this? What's it all about? And you can imagine if they're talking, why does John baptize? Does it have something to do with purification? And if it has anything to do with it, probably Jesus' baptism is better because more people are going out to Him. And something got brought up probably that was

comparing Jesus' baptism with John's baptism and it got John's followers all stirred up. And listen to how John answers.

Verse 27, A person cannot receive even one thing unless it's given him from Heaven. You yourselves bear me witness that I said I'm not the Christ, but I've been sent before Him. The one who has the bride is the bridegroom.

The friend of the bridegroom who stands and hears Him rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice. Therefore, this joy of mine is now complete. Listen to this.

He must increase, but I must decrease. Why do you tell somebody, I told you I'm not the Christ? It's because these guys, brethren, you get the feeling that they're running up to John and they're trying to draw John out. They're trying to get John to defend himself, defend his ministry, defend his baptism, and somehow find fault with Jesus.

And I would just say this, you know what strikes me? John the Baptist is going through his ministry and if you look back at chapter 1. At chapter 1, verse 23, he calls Jesus the Lord. In chapter 1, verse 27, he describes Jesus as He whose sandal I am not worthy to untie. In verse 29, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

In verse 30, He who ranks above me. In verse 32, the one John saw the Spirit descend upon. In verse 33, He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.

In verse 34, the Son of God. Do you know the followers of Jesus had been shown? Behold, the Lamb of God. I am a voice crying out in the wilderness.

He's crying out for the paths. Make straight the paths of the Lord. He's introducing Christ as the Son of God.

The Lamb of God. As He whose sandals He's not even worthy to touch. And isn't it amazing when the followers of John come to Him, how do they describe Him? Do they say, Rabbi, the Lamb of God is out there.

It's almost flippant and irreverent. They just kind of say, He who was with you across the Jordan, to whom you bore witness. Look, He is baptizing and all are going to Him.

I get the feeling there's anything but honor and respect in those words. It almost sounds like disdain and animosity. Brethren, I get the feeling somewhere in all this discussion, a jealous, competitive spirit flared up in John's followers.

I mean, what was John known for? John the...? I mean, they weren't doing baptisms like this in the Old Testament. John came on the scene. He's doing this baptism of repentance.

He's the one who inaugurated baptism. He initiated this. Jesus, He's a copycat.

You can see them looking at that. And now look, He came along and He took up the practice of our Rabbi and now everybody's going out to Him. John, what are you going to do about this? What should we make of this? I mean, John's known for this.

You look at John 4.1. Now, when Jesus learned that the Pharisees had heard that Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John. Do you see it? Jesus was making and baptizing more disciples than John. You can hear it.

The Jew that these followers were talking to, no doubt, He fueled this fire. But John repeatedly insisted that being first doesn't make Him first and it doesn't make Him best. I mean, John 3.28, you yourself bear me witness.

I said, I'm not the Christ. I've been sent before Him. That's true.

I came before Him. But the one who has the bride is the bridegroom. In other words, Christ is the bridegroom.

The friend of the bridegroom, that's Him. He's just the best man who stands and hears Him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice. Or John 1.15, John bore witness about Him and cried out, this was He of whom I said, He who comes after me ranks before me because He was before me.

You see, John repeatedly... I mean, this comes up again in John 1.26. I baptize with water, but among you stands one you do not know. Even he who comes after me, the strap of whose sandal I'm not worthy to untie. John 1.30, this is He of whom I said, after me comes a man who ranks before me because He was before me.

This letter starts out, this is the Word. The Word who was in the beginning with God and who was God. And John is saying, this One who comes after me actually existed before me and He's greater than me and I'm not worthy to touch His sandal.

And he's saying this to his disciples because they've come to Him with this aggravation, with this competitive spirit. Brethren, this is where the message starts. That's all introduction.

Brethren, you know what we have here? We have an example of people that you don't want to imitate. I'm sure it doesn't take special abilities to see that the followers of John are not good examples, but I specifically want you to see one thing here. Brethren, think with me.

400 years of silence. And now, when John starts, does he not say, the Kingdom is at hand? And Jesus comes on the scene and He says the Kingdom is at hand. The Kingdom of God is on the move.

Things are happening. God's program is in full swing. John the Baptist was not the Christ, but he came to reveal the Christ.

He was a voice of one crying in the wilderness, make straight the way of the Lord. John had been pointing right at Christ from the beginning. Behold, he pointed away from himself.

Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. And you know what? As John's disciples were pointing out, all are going out to Him. But do you know what? When they said that, it wasn't true, was it? Not all were going out to Him.

Because who wasn't going out to Him? Who wasn't going out to Christ? I mean, here's the followers of John. They're saying, John, all men are going out to Him. You know what John could have said to them? Then how come you aren't? They weren't going out.

Brethren, you know what? There is so much hype in our generation about all this left behind stuff. Movies made. Left behind series.

Brethren, that's a bunch of garbage, most of that stuff. But you know what? Here's a true biblical example of those who are left behind. Brethren, we don't want to imitate this.

Real living examples of being left behind. These people did not move forward when it was time to move forward. And they've been left behind.

I mean, can you imagine when it all started? And it's just John out there. John has taken the scene. John is out there.

The Pharisees are hearing. Christ, the Prophet, Elijah. Word is coming up.

And officials go out from Jerusalem. We've come out. We need to know who you are.

All the people were going out to Him. In those early days, to be a follower of John was to be in God's program. You were on track.

That's where the truth was. Walk out of Jerusalem and leave behind all the formal traditionalism and Pharisaicalism and out to where the true man of God, the Prophet of God is speaking. In those days, to be baptized by John, to be a follower of John, to be a disciple of John, that was to be in God's program.

But now, the Lamb of God had come! And John was pointing away from himself again and again and again, saying to them, I'm not the Christ. I'm not Him. I've told you I'm not Him.

There's One that stands in our midst. There He is. I mean, Andrew and John, they went when He said, Behold the Lamb of God! They looked and they said, Rabbi, they came to Him.

They stayed that day at His house. That was the thing to do. Brethren, there's a right time to be in certain places and there is a wrong time.

There is a time to grow. There is a time to move. God's program is not static.

It's moving. And these people were left behind. Left behind.

Brethren, I can remember. This is what you do not want to imitate. I can remember a day, brethren, when Craig and I and Rod, we were first saved and we were attending certain churches and when we would come in there, I remember one Reformed Baptist church up there in Kalamazoo, and they were very excited to have us.

We were newly saved. There was lots of spiritual energy there. We were excited about truth.

We were excited about what we were learning. We were in the Scriptures all the time, listening like many of you young people. And I can tell you this, as I now am 22 years in, I don't want to get left behind.

What I see happening, I see young people being converted today with a hunger for the Word of God. With a hunger that going hard after God, praying and fasting and memorizing Scripture and seeking to love one another and keep their conscience clear. And I can tell you, after 22 years of running this race, you can grow weary and you can tire.

But I don't want to get left behind. These guys got left behind when it was time to say, onward! This has been good. This time with John profitable.

But now it is time to run. And I'll tell you, I see these young folks and I see people coming up and running up behind me. And in this Christian race, we've got to run fast and hard.

It's a marathon. We've got to make it to the end. Brethren, we don't want to get in a place where we somehow drift and we get left behind.

And one after another, people are passing us up. That's what I see in these men. I see they had it right at one point.

They were in the right place. They were in God's program. They were where you wanted to be.

But as time goes on, brethren, my wife came across something. Most of you know our missionary that we support over in China. And he's back here off the field right now.

And he was meeting with one of his old friends. And that old friend's wife, she was in on those conversations and she put something out there that Ruby came across. And she said, both those guys, they're now in their 60's.

And they were saying, we want to finish well. They don't want to get left behind. I hear it in Bob.

Bob is at the end. And even now, he doesn't want to coast. And he doesn't want to get left behind.

Hard to the end. To the last day. Brethren, we don't want to be like these guys.

We don't want to get in the place where we're in the has-been crowd. Where we've kind of passed off. Where we're kind of set aside.

We don't want that, brethren. That isn't it. We want to be like John and like Andrew.

Yes, they were in the right place. And when it was proper to be a follower of John, but when the finger was pointed over here, on they ran. In God's plan.

Where the kingdom took them. Not coasting. Not getting their eyes set aside.

Brethren, you know where they were supposed to be? Because their eyes weren't on the right thing. Their eyes weren't on Christ. Their eyes were on John.

John was pointing them away. But they got distracted. Brethren, they got distracted.

That's what we don't want to do. We don't want to get left behind because we get distracted. There are many distractions in this world.

Many. May God help us. Brethren, can you imagine? Can you imagine? If Jesus was over in one of these cemeteries with a crowd of people full of grace and truth, the fullness of the Godhead in bodily manifestation.

The Word has become flesh. He's teaching like no one's ever taught. He's over there declaring such truths.

And you're over here arguing purification with Him. Can you even imagine? Brethren, I don't want to get left behind like that. Brethren, can you imagine to have had the opportunity to sit at Christ's feet Himself, the King of glory, and they're arguing purification with a Jew.

Their attention was on the wrong thing. They were distracted, brethren. And in their distraction, they were left behind.

Brethren, Christ is present. Christ is speaking. The Son of God is an invaded space and time.

You don't want to be talking purification. Don't get left behind. Don't get distracted on things that don't matter.

Don't imitate these guys. Brethren, now, we'll shift gears the other way. Obviously, the man to imitate here in these verses is John the Baptist.

At least I see in John someone I want to be like. And you know what? I don't doubt there are many qualities about John that we could look at. I don't doubt any number.

But brethren, if there's one thing I want to imitate in him, if there's one thing that stands out to me, if there's one thing that I look at in John and I say, I want that. You know what it is? Just listen to verses 29 and 30. The one who has the bride is the bridegroom.

The friend of the bridegroom who stands and hears him rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice. Therefore, this joy of mine is now complete. He must increase, but I must decrease.

And look, John is not saying that he needs to be more sanctified and that he needs to die to self more and that Jesus needs to become more important to him. A lot of people use these verses that way. That's not what he's saying.

Now, that may be true. John wasn't perfected yet. He may have needed that.

But you know what he's saying? His words in verse 30 are pretty simple. He's saying it is in God's program for my ministry to diminish now and for all people to go after Christ. That's the way it should be.

I'm only the forerunner. I'm the friend. He's the bridegroom.

It is right and it is fitting that my ministry is decreasing right now and all men are going after Him. Because that's the thing that they said when they charged up there to Him. That's what they were saying.

All men are going to Him. Look! Almost like little kids telling on Jesus. John, look! Rabbis.

I mean, they give John a very respectful type. Rabbis. They just call Jesus he.

Brethren, it might be true that John needed increased sanctification. But when he says Jesus must increase, but I, John, must decrease, he's basically saying it is right that my ministry has the sun setting over it. It is diminishing.

It is going away. He probably didn't realize that he was soon to be thrown in Herod's prison, but he knew that this was right. And he says in verse 28 that it's from the Lord.

It's obviously appointed from the Lord. John's simply saying to his disciples, listen, Jesus ought to have the attention of the bride because He's the bridegroom. I'm the best man.

I'm just a voice crying in the wilderness. It's right that the bride should go to Jesus. And so, brethren, the two words that just leap off the page at me are rejoices and joy.

And you see them both in verse 29. The friend of the bridegroom who stands and hears Him rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice. Therefore, this joy of mine is now complete.

Brethren, it may not jump off the page at you, but I ask you, Christian, do you want this? Do you want to have a life where you are so overflowing with joy? Full! His joy is full! And to be able to say it from the deep depths of your soul and your being that you rejoice and your joy is full at a time in life when God is taking things away from you. And that's what was happening. Brethren, we can look at John and we can say, you know, so often we can look at things in Scripture, but unless you really personalize this, I'll tell you what, it is typically not easy for any of us to be in a place in life where God is taking things away from us and to be able to say that our joy is full.

I mean, typically, when God begins, you think about what's John losing? How is he decreasing? He's decreasing by way of ministry. Hey, I can remember Martyn Lloyd-Jones talking about a man who had tremendous success in his ministry and at one point in his life, God seemed to take it away and the man was never the same again. I've read that about various men.

That they had times of great success in their ministry and God took it away and they didn't respond like John. Brethren, the truth, whether it's ministry, whether it's popularity, whether it's friends, brethren, it always comes back to things other than Christ that we greatly have a tendency to desire in this life. And you just have God take those things away from you.

Brethren, we all have things aside from Christ that tend to attract our affections more than other things. And you just ask yourself, when those things are being taken away by the Lord, to be able to say, nevertheless, my joy is full. Brethren, I want that.

I want to imitate that sort of joy. I mean, when He can say I must fade, but I have no sorrow over that. Just the opposite.

Brethren, doesn't anything jump off the pages at you that makes you say I want that, but I don't find that real easy all the time? Brethren, this is definitely an example for us to imitate. I long for this. When Jesus increases, your joy increases.

No matter circumstantially what is true of your life. Don't you want to be there? The increase of Jesus increases my joy. Period.

No matter what else is true. And brethren, the truth is, we have to say a lot of times, our joy doesn't necessarily increase when Jesus is on the increase. And what I mean by on the increase is when He's becoming more known.

When His glory is shining forth more fully. When some new advances are in motion evangelistically or on the mission field. When He's being made more known.

When He's being proclaimed. When there's sister churches that all of a sudden endeavor in some new outreach. But no, typically, when it's some other group, then all of a sudden there's tendencies for competitiveness, for jealousy.

We have a difficulty being able to rejoice. Can you imagine? It's not only when you see somebody else doing what you're doing and then they're making Christ known not being able to rejoice, but at the same time when you're actually in a position where your effectiveness is decreasing, to be able to look at that. I can remember reading about one pastor in London who saw a Spurgeon and he was jealous.

And he could not rejoice that so many people were being saved. And he could not pray for Spurgeon. And you know what his testimony was? His testimony was that when God broke him of that jealous spirit and competitive spirit, and when he humbled himself and he began to pray for Spurgeon, he began to see the increase in his own worth.

But God kept it away as long as it was an idol to him. Brethren, I want this. I want to live such a life that when Jesus increases, my joy increases, and no matter my circumstances, they can never impinge, they cannot alter that joy of mine at all.

I long for that. And here we have an example of one whose joy was full. I mean, he doesn't bat an eye.

He's like saying to his disciples, you come to Me all fretting and all distressed because Jesus is getting the preeminence. And this doesn't even cause ripples on my pond of tranquility here. I am in such joy and peace and contentment as I see the bridegroom having the bride go unto himself.

This caused him rejoicing. And I want that. Brethren, I want to get past feeling good or feeling lousy in life based on what I have.

I mean, brethren, I know it. I know this is a struggle. Some of you want to be married.

Do you want to get past having a good day or a bad day based on whether God brings you a husband or a wife? I mean, I want that. Brethren, based on whether we have enough money or don't have enough money, based on whether we're financially secure or not, based on whether people treat us the way we want them to treat us or not, based on whether we're successful or not or popular or praised, or when we're not. I mean, don't you want that? Don't you want your joy to be full and rejoicing in the bridegroom's voice? I mean, that's heaven on earth when we're so freed from our circumstances.

And that's John. I mean, John. There's no indication God gave him a wife.

No indication God gave him a family. No indication God gave him anything but this short time, almost like six month ministry, and it was short-lived, and then it faded off the scene, and then he was thrown in Herod's prison! I mean, you can look at that and say, well, yeah, his circumstances were pretty lousy. He probably had reason to be dejected, discouraged, depressed.

And instead, he's saying to his disciples, I'm so full of joy. That's what he's saying to them. Brethren, if we're going to imitate him, I think we need to imitate... There's three things, there may be more, but there were three things that kind of jumped at me as areas that we ought to be able to imitate him.

His thinking. Brethren, all this was coming out of the way he thought. We need to imitate the way he thinks.

I mean, if you want to imitate John the Baptist, and you want to have this kind of joy, we have to have thinking like he has. And I'll just finish up this message by these three points. There's three ways that I see John thinking that I think we have to think if we're going to imitate him.

The first one is this, verse 27. John answered his disciples this way, a person cannot receive even one thing unless it's given him from Heaven. Brethren, we have to have a contentment in the sovereignty of God.

I would say this, brethren, let us imitate John in his thinking that God is perfectly crafting the circumstances of my life. Notice again what he says. A person cannot receive even one thing unless it's given him from Heaven.

Brethren, don't we have a tendency in our life to think God's forgotten us? God's passed over us. Look at this guy over here. I'm looking for a job before he was.

And he gets one. I wanted to be married before they did. And they are and I'm not.

I mean, we have this tendency to think, why am I in these circumstances? God's forgotten me. Lord, why have You forgotten me? But brethren, it really helps to know not even one thing is true in your life except God has designed into it. And you can be certain of this.

You have the trying circumstances in your life that you have right now because it's the best thing for you to have. And God full well knows it. And a lot of times, brethren, you have the very thing that you have because it's the very thing that is necessary in your life to make you most like Christ.

And without it, it would leave untouched the area of your life where you are least like Christ. Brethren, I had one sister here tell me just recently, she said, you know, there's all these people in church that want to be married, and here I am. I wish I was single.

And brethren, the point is, we always have this idea that if we were in somebody else's circumstances, it'd be so much better. But don't you realize God is sovereignly crafting the life of each one of His children to have you where you are right now? Because He's got your good in mind and He's got Christ's likeness and you know what? John realized that. John, look, you know what else we tend to think? Not only God has forgotten us, we think when things take on a dark cloud in our life, that not only has God forgotten us, we tend to have a thought that God is angry with us.

You know what? John didn't say, oh, woe is me! God's taking my ministry away. He must be angry at me. You know what? Jesus came along and said to His own disciples, I'll tell you, of those born among women, there's not a greater.

I mean, here's God's estimation. There's not a greater born among women than John the Baptist. I mean, why is He losing His ministry? Obviously, because losing your ministry doesn't have anything to do with how much God loves you.

God takes things out of our life all the time because it is a manifestation of His love. Not because it's an indication God is upset with us. And John realized this.

John could be so overwhelmingly full of joy because nothing about the love of God towards him... He was convinced God gives what He gives and it is ordered and he could rest in that. Brethren, if we're going to

live in that tranquility of joy amidst adverse circumstances in life, we have to be convinced there is a God in heaven that rules even the smallest little aspects of my life. And He's controlling them perfectly.

And I wouldn't have it unless it was for my greatest good. Brethren, if He loves us with the same love He loves Christ with, you can be certain that love, if He sent His Son to die for you, you can be certain He's not going to spare anything else in your life that is for your best good. You don't go give your only begotten Son, the choicest object of your love, give Him in somebody's behalf and then withhold lesser good from them.

It doesn't happen. John's convinced of that. The second thing, if we're going to consider John's thinking, oh, brethren, we need to think and remember and recognize who we are.

Listen to John. John 1, verse 19. This is the testimony of John.

When the Jews sent priests and Levites from Jerusalem to ask Him, who are You? He confessed and did not deny, but confessed, I'm not the Christ. Look, He understands who He is. I am not the Christ.

They asked Him, what then? Are You Elijah? He said, I am not. Are You the Prophet? And He answered, no. Look at John 1, verse 25.

They asked Him, then why are You baptizing if You're neither the Christ nor Elijah nor the Prophet? John answered them, I baptize with water, but among you stands one you do not know, even he who comes after Me, the strap of whose sandal I'm not worthy to untie. He recognizes I'm not the Christ, I'm not Elijah, I'm not the Prophet, and I'm not worthy to touch the shoes of this One known as Jesus. John 3.28, you yourselves bear me witness that I said I'm not the Christ, but I've been sent before Him.

The one who has the bride is the bridegroom, the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears Him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice. You know what? John recognizes He's just a friend. He's a friend of the bridegroom.

He realizes He's a voice. He's not the Lord Himself, but He's a voice crying in the wilderness. Yes, He may be the greatest born among women, but He recognizes He is totally unworthy to even touch the shoe of Jesus.

Brethren, can I tell you something that jumps out at me about John? He did not feel he had to guard his reputation. He knew who he was. He was unworthy.

John Wesley said this, when I devoted to God my ease, my time, my fortune, my life, I did not accept my reputation. Brethren, you know what? Very often, we being here on the east side, we try to help people with their bills and with rent sometimes. There's times we get some people that come in here with a pretty demanding attitude.

Kind of demanding rent. They come with this entitlement mentality almost like we owe them. And that tends to chafe on you if you're trying to deal with people like that.

But brethren, do we not so often act the very same way towards God? Brethren, we tend to moan and complain and cry when any difficult thing comes on our life. We almost feel an entitlement to good health, fair weather, finances in order. You know what? Sometimes we feel like we want to complain about the place we have in life, our marital situation, the situation with our children, the situation with our job, the

situation with our health.

Once in a while, we need to stand still like John and remember we're not Christ. We're not God. The universe does not revolve around us.

We need to remember how unworthy we really are. We need to remember that if we were in hell right now, we would be exactly where we deserve to be. We need to remember that anything short of hell, we're getting such mercy and grace.

That can help your joy phenomenally. I mean, I just wrote to a guy in prison. He's complaining all about his situation.

And I wrote to him and I told him, sir, it's almost like he feels like the state's treating me unfair and the prison's treating me unfair and these people. And I wrote to him and I said, sir, if you could right now get what you deserve and then get put back in that prison, you'd be like jumping for joy. Right? To be in a prison in Texas versus being in hell for what our sins deserve, brethren, that would be a tremendous mercy.

You know, a lot of times we have to remember who we are and what we deserve. And it can help us be extremely joyful. But then, the third thing.

I mean, for one, he had a right thinking about the sovereignty of God. Two, he had a right thinking about who he was. And then, he had a right thinking about Christ.

In fact, maybe I'll just say this. His thinking was all on Christ. Brethren, it strikes me.

John 1.19. This is the testimony of John. Listen, the Jews went to him and they said, who are you? Do you know what I find again and again with John? They said, who are you? Well, let me tell you who I am. I'm the one that Isaiah prophesied about.

I'm the one Malachi prophesied about. I mean, when they said, are you Elijah? If there was ever an opportunity for him to steer that conversation towards his own glory and himself, didn't Jesus say to His disciples, if you have ears to hear, John was Elijah. He is the Elijah that was to come.

And yet, of all opportunities, are you the Elijah? He could have said, you better believe I am. Let me tell you about my ministry. I'm turning back many to the fathers and fathers to the sons.

And I'm making a way for the Lord. And my ministry is great. And repentance.

But you know, he never did that. His conversation, who are you? He said, I'm not the Christ. What then? You Elijah? He said, I'm not.

And he's not being dishonest there because it was one that would come in the spirit of Elijah. Not exactly Elijah himself. And I think he's just saying, I'm not what you Jews think.

The Jews were actually looking for Elijah himself to come. And he says, I'm not. Are you the prophet? Moses spoke about the prophet that would come.

He says, no. They said to him, who are you? We need to give an answer to those. There's so many opportunities here for him to parade his own ministry out there.

He says, I'm just a voice making straight the way of the Lord. There's so many times here, John 1.25, they asked him, why are you baptizing if you're neither Christ, Elijah, or the prophet? John answered them, I baptize with water. He would start with himself, but quickly go straight.

But there's one among you, a stand ye do not know, even he who comes after me, the strap of whose sandal I'm not worthy to untie. John 1.31, I myself. Here he starts with himself.

He says, I didn't know him, but for this purpose, I came baptizing with water that he might be revealed. John 1.33, I myself did not know him. Again, he starts with himself.

But he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, he on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit. John 1.34, I have seen. Starts with himself.

Turns it right to Christ. I have borne witness that this is the Son of God. John was not interested in self-promotion.

You look at what John said. He took the conversation straight to Christ all the time. Brethren, think about imitating.

Thinking right thoughts about the sovereignty of God. Thinking right thoughts about who you are and having a mind. Imitating Him with a mind that has stayed on Christ.

I talked about last week, eliminating from our lives those things that cause our minds to wander from Christ. Brethren, we need minds, hearts, souls. We need days that are consumed with Christ.

We need to put away the distractions. We are called to be a people of Christ, a follower of Christ, to be people that are witnesses of Christ, those who are owned by Christ. We don't belong to ourselves.

We've been bought with a price. We belong to Christ. We are the bride of Christ.

We are the ones bought by Christ. We are the ones that are headed to live forever with Christ. We are the ones that are being transformed into the image of Christ.

We are the forerunners today. We are the witnesses. We are the ones that are supposed to go into this world, and when the world first sees us, then quickly, their eyes come off us to Christ.

Are we not the witnesses today? John said in his day, he came to be a witness. But Jesus passed that baton on to those that came after. We are now the witnesses.

The church is the one that is to make disciples and proclaim Christ in the world. We are the ones, brethren, wherever we go, didn't the Apostles say, we are a fragrance of Christ? The aroma. That's to be it.

To be people that are geared that direction. I know some of us talk more than others. But in the talking that we do, brethren, it's a dead giveaway where our thoughts are.

And until you have thoughts permeated with Christ, you will not speak right of Christ or act right towards Christ. Brethren, if one thing is true that I can see in all that John the Baptist was, he was a man that was Christ-centered. He was a man taken up.

Brethren, let us imitate him. Right thinking about the sovereignty. Right thinking about ourselves.

Think about what you deserve. And think about Christ. Is it a small thing that He bought us with His own sufferings on the cross? Is it a light matter to us that in eternal hell that you and I deserve, we're drank in a cup in three hours on that cross? The sun forbore to shine.

The Mighty Maker became man, bore what you and I could not bear. He endured what you and I could not endure. He bought for us eternal life and inheritance with an eternal weight of glory in it.

And who can compare it? Who can imagine what is there for us? Eternal life. Our sins demanded justice. They demanded that we suffer for what we have done in despising the glory of God for all of them.

Is it a small thing? Should Christ not be the center of our affections? Should He not be? And here we have John the Baptist. Brethren, may we imitate Him. When God takes away that which is precious to you, may we be imitators of John the Baptist.

May we be such people that it does not put a wrinkle in our joy. Brethren, you know what John tells me? John saved sinners like us. He tells me that life is possible in a redeemed sinner.

That life is possible to a Christian. There is an example for us to imitate. And may God give us the ability to do it, brethren.

Amen.

---

Video: <https://sermonindex2.b-cdn.net/DZJzKDY6AG8.mp4>  
Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/tim-conway/a-man-to-imitate/>

# *Grow in Your Walk with Christ*

---

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

**[www.sermonindex.net](http://www.sermonindex.net)**