

Walking in Love  
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Allen Power

Ephesians 5:1-10

Toddlers learn and develop by imitating their parents. This week at our house we saw an example of how a one-year-old learns by mimicking. In our kitchen we have an Amazon Echo “smart speaker.” Susan uses it by calling on “Alexa” to play toddler tunes like “Baby Shark,” “Old MacDonald,” etc. for our grandson Knox. One day this week she noticed that Knox was pointing to the Echo and very forcefully saying something like “Awawa!” Over and over and with increasing loudness he would look, point, and command: “Awawa! Awawa!” Of course I have it all on video. It will be sad if his first real word is “Alexa (smile.)”

For a one-year-old, imitation isn't just cute. An article from Parents.com says, *“By copying adults during this crucial year of growth, 1-year-olds learn a vast array of skills. Imitation is vital to the development of abilities ranging from language to social skills,”* - Lisa Nalven, M.D., [from the same article:] *“...age 1 marks the beginning of true imitation, or imitation with intent. “A 1-year-old understands that the actions he's copying have a significance,”* says Howard Klein, M.D.<sup>1</sup>

In Ephesians five Paul continues his practical teaching of how followers of Jesus should live our lives. He begins this chapter with the command: *“...be imitators of God, as beloved children.”*

Big Idea: For a toddler, imitation is “vital” to learning how to live in the world. For the follower of Christ, imitating the love and character of Jesus is how we learn to live the Christian life. Question: Are we working as hard at imitating Jesus as a toddler does in imitating their parents?

Ephesians 5:1–10 (ESV)  
**Walk in Love**

**5** Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. **2** And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

- Once again Paul uses the metaphor of “walking” for living life.
- The first thing to imitate about Jesus is His love.

1 John 4:7–11 (ESV)

**7** Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. **8** Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love.

- If you’re really a follower of Christ you will love others. If love for others is not evident in your personality, we might question if you ARE His follower.
- How God prove His love for us? John continues:

**9** In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. **10** In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation [sacrifice] for our sins. **11** Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.

- As Paul wrote in verse two: *“Christ loved us and gave himself up for us.”*
- **What will our behavior look like if we are imitating Christ’s love?**
- Scripture is filled with instruction on how to imitate Christ’s love but we only have to look back at the end of chapter four to see an example.

Ephesians 4:31–32 (NLT)

**31** Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander, as well as all types of evil behavior. **32** Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you.

- How would our conduct be different if, before every encounter with someone, a little voice (Holy Spirit) whispered: “Show the love of Christ?”
- This isn’t just about being more reasonable in the midst of conflict. Showing the love of Christ should apply to every human interaction.
- When I speak to my spouse (“Show the love of Christ;”) when I’m with my kids (“Show the love of Christ;”) at work (“Show the love of Christ.”)
- The first thing we should imitate about Christ is His selfless love.
- What else should we imitate about Christ? Again, just study scripture> The Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7 is a good place to start.
- Another important way to imitate Christ is to imitate His holiness:

1 Peter 1:14–16 (ESV)

<sup>14</sup> As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, <sup>15</sup> but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, <sup>16</sup> since it is written, “You shall be holy, for I am holy.”

- Paul went there in verse three of Ephesians four. Here’s what NOT to do!

<sup>3</sup> But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints.

- Verse three: **When you hear of a prominent Christian who has “fallen” in a moral failing, what is it usually about? Why did Paul put sexual immorality and covetousness together?**
- Verse three: A Christ-follower must control our appetites and desires.
- Wiersbe: *“The fornicator and the covetous person each desire to satisfy the appetite by taking what does not belong to them. “The lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes” (1 John 2:16)”<sup>ii</sup>*

- Another commentator: *“Since these vices portray selfishness and unconcern for others, a believer should **not** have **even a hint of these sins in his life.**”<sup>iii</sup>*
- These desires and appetites are so strong they can only be controlled through the power of the Holy Spirit. (Illustration: “Billy Graham Rule.”)<sup>iv</sup>
- Imagine another little voice: When lust creeps in, “Am I imitating Jesus?” When greed shows up, “Am I imitating Jesus?”

<sup>4</sup> Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving.

- Now Paul shifts from our eyes to our mouths. Would Jesus tell that joke?
- If we’re imitating Jesus we’ll use our mouths for worship and thanksgiving.
- We might say, “I never tell a dirty joke!” But, do we snicker at one?
- In verse five Paul draws a hard line that could be misunderstood.

<sup>5</sup> For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God.

- **Is Paul saying if I die right after a lustful or greedy thought I won’t go to heaven? If not, then what IS he saying? What about David’s sins regarding Bathsheba? What does Psalm 51 tell me about that?**
- Paul is talking about a habitual pattern of sin not the occasional act of sin. Again, if there is habitual, repeated sin and no conviction it raises the question of whether that person has experienced salvation (regeneration.)
- A thought: Sinful thoughts are like skunks, you can’t keep them from crossing your path but you don’t want to make them your pet!

<sup>6</sup> Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.

<sup>7</sup> Therefore do not become partners with them;

- What do those verses mean? It's really pretty simple. Paul is talking about the people who say, *"You Christ-followers are too uptight! Lighten up! Everyone fantasizes about people other than their spouse! Everyone enjoys a little dirty joke now and then! Everyone imagines taking away someone else's money and stuff! We're all human so don't be so uptight!"*
- The NLT: <sup>6</sup> Don't be fooled by those who try to excuse these sins, for the anger of God will fall on all who disobey him. <sup>7</sup> Don't participate in the things these people do.<sup>v</sup> (Illustration: "Cussing" preachers of 2006-07)
- A note of caution: Some of us take the command "do not become partners with them" to an extreme. We can't share our faith with unbelievers unless we have a relationship, but association with some one is not the same as participating in behavior that isn't pleasing to Christ.
- If you want proof that you can associate with unbelievers without being a "stick in the mud" just imitate Jesus. The gospels are filled with His example of loving sinners without participating in their sin.
- So how should we live as followers of Christ?

Ephesians 5:8–9 (ESV)

<sup>8</sup> for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light <sup>9</sup> (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true),

- Jesus said in these familiar verses from the Sermon on the Mount:

Matthew 5:14–16 (ESV)

<sup>14</sup> "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden.

<sup>15</sup> Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. <sup>16</sup> In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

- Paul sums up today's passage in verse 10 of Ephesians 4: <sup>10</sup> and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord.
- **How do we discern what is pleasing to the Lord? What does scripture say makes it impossible to please God (Heb. 11:6, Rom. 8:8-9?) How does Romans 12:1-2 speak to this? What about John 14:15?**

So, What's the Takeaway?

- In His creative wisdom God “hardwired” toddlers to imitate their parents so they can learn to live in the world.
- They observe, imitate, and practice until they get it right. That's why Paul used this metaphor to illustrate growing more like Jesus.
- Quoting the article on toddlers: *“A 1-year-old understands that the actions he's copying have a significance,”*
- Question for reflection: Do I really place significance on working hard to imitate Christ? Do I look at Jesus' example and commands in scripture as a standard of character to strive to emulate? Do I make it a priority?
- We might throw up our hands, *“Why even try? I can't be holy like Jesus!”*
- Toddlers don't give up imitating out of fear of failure. In a toddler's mind the only way to eventually be like the big folks is to keep trying to do what they do. We can learn a lot from a toddler!
- This week, let's “walk as children of light” continually asking ourselves, “Am I imitating Jesus?” and asking Him to help us to do that through His Spirit living in us.

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<sup>i</sup> <https://www.parents.com/toddlers-preschoolers/development/behavioral/what-your-child-learns-by-imitating-you/>

<sup>ii</sup> Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible exposition commentary* (Vol. 2, p. 44). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

<sup>iii</sup> Hoehner, H. W. (1985). *Ephesians*. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, p. 638). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

<sup>iv</sup> <https://billygraham.org/story/the-modesto-manifesto-a-declaration-of-biblical-integrity/>

<sup>v</sup> Tyndale House Publishers. (2015). *Holy Bible: New Living Translation* (Eph 5:6–7). Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.