

Text: Ephesians 4:31-5:2

Theme: Imitating God

August 12, 2018

Kids love to imitate. They imitate what we do, what we say, and, sometimes, they even imitate our emotions. But why are they so eager to imitate? Because it's how they learn. When God created us, He gave us the ability to imitate, to learn by doing. In today's text, Paul specifically says, "Be imitators of God." So, we take the next few moments to remind ourselves of how to imitate our Creator.

I. Our God designed us to imitate Him. A. To imitate, we need to discard. 1. Paul tells us what to discard as he says, "Put off your old self." Out with the old and in with the new. It's kinda like remodeling your house, right? You get rid of the old carpet, drapes, paint colors. and in comes the new. It sounds simple, but, we have a problem. We like the old. If it were simple to get rid of the old, we would have done it years ago and Paul wouldn't even need to mention it. However, we like the old because it seems to fit us so well. Since we were born with it, it feels like a natural fit, but Paul says, "To imitate Christ, haul the old self out to the garbage and leave it there."

2. We also need to discard everything that decreases value. Paul gives us a short list just to get us thinking, "Get rid of anger, slander, bitterness, grudges." Now, just to be clear, Paul's list isn't all inclusive. Maybe we look at the list and say, "I don't see any of those things in my life, so I'm good to go," but God won't let us off the hook that easily. To be imitators of God, we need to practice discarding, to actively gather up everything that diminishes the value of others and also our value, set it on the side of the curb, and watch the garbage man haul it away. Until we focus on discarding the old, we're not in a position to imitate our God with the new.

B. How, then, do we imitate our Creator? We imitate by practicing. 1. We practice kindness. As Paul says, "Be kind to one another," we want to say, "I learned that in kindergarten." But learning and doing aren't the same thing. To imitate God, Paul says, "Make it your daily habit. Do it when it's easy to do and when it's not easy." God spells out the need because He knows we need help, that it doesn't come naturally. One of the best ways to practice kindness, is to be aware of it. When we remember that God expects kindness regardless of the circumstances, we learn to practice what we've known since kindergarten.

2. We also practice endurance. How easy is it to quit? Left to ourselves, we would be like those people who start ten different things, but never finish any of them. God gives us a perfect example in our Old Testament lesson. Elijah had been doing God's work faithfully and in the midst of great difficulties. But finally, his endurance seems to run out as he says, "I give up. Take my life, Lord, because if You don't Jezebel will kill me before tomorrow." Have any of us been in a situation that critical? Whatever we face, no matter the magnitude or the time frame, God continues to say, "Imitate Me. Endure because I have endured so much for you!"

3. As we imitate God, we practice compassion. Jesus always knew when and how to offer compassion. If only we could be like Him, imitating would be so much easier. Although we aren't like Him, He still gives us the power to imitate by practicing compassion. As we look at the examples He provides, we learn how to imitate. Consider the Good Samaritan. First, he notices the need. Then, he responds. In all our busyness, God says, "Notice. There are hurting people all

around you. Notice them and then do what I give you to do because, when it's motivated by a heart of love, it will always be the right thing."

4. We practice by forgiving. How old were you when you first learned about forgiving? One would think we'd have it down to a fine science by now, but we all know that's not true. Paul knew our challenge. That's why he says, "Forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you." Forgive as God forgives. That's imitating God, but how do we forgive as He forgives? We choose to forgive even when it isn't the first thing on our list. As we do so, we forgive without reservation. None of that "I'll forgive you for this, but not for that." Forgive period. And then, follow forgiveness with ignorance. Forgive and remember it no more. It's how we imitate God.

5. We practice by putting on our new self. Remember the old that we left for the garbage man? Now, there's a void that we fill with the new self. The new self isn't anything like the old. As we put on the new self through the power of our Baptism where we drown the old and put on the new, Paul speaks about renewing and remodeling. The imagery is easy for us to understand because we know all about remodeling, about making things that are old become new. But this old to new isn't slapping on a new coat of paint to merely hide the old. It's the imagery of gutting the house to the bare walls and starting over. That's how we put on the new.

6. We practice by walking in Christian love. We recognize the words from our kids singing, "Beloved, let us love one another. For love is of God and everyone who loveth is born of God and knoweth God." Christian love is the Christian's response to God's forgiveness. Because we believe in the forgiveness of sins, we believe in Christian love, and if we believe in Christian love, we also believe in walking in that love. Talk about Christian love is cheap. Anybody can talk. But as we imitate, we are doers. We practice Christian love by promoting unity, harmony, and a focus on our collective mission - to be and to bring one more person along with us to heaven.

7. As we imitate, we practice faith. How many people could you find in the Old or New Testament who put their faith into action? Every instance where Jesus says, "Your faith has made you well," is a reminder for us to imitate their faith, to practice faith. Today, we are surrounded by wonderful examples of faith. As we imitate those examples, we imitate Christ. Faith is not what we know, but what we do with what we know. The more fervent our faith, the more committed our faith, the more focused we are on that faith and putting it into action, the more we will do what God designed us to do. The more we will imitate Christ.

8. Our kids, grandkids, and even great grandkids will continue to imitate, but as they do so, allow them to be reminders, reminders that prompt us to say to ourselves, "How can I imitate my Creator today!" Amen.