

Ephesians 5:1–2 | “We Are God Imitators”  
*Preached on September 28, 2025 by Pastor Matt Brown*

Turn in your Bibles this morning to Ephesians 5, and we will be in verses 1 and 2 this morning. *[pauseeee]*

*We are back at it in the book of Ephesians, seeing what glorious treasures it holds for us.*

And today, we will be seeing our need to imitate God, and specifically, imitate His love. *[pause]*

Let's READ the passage to begin. *[READ]*

“[Commentator N.T.] Wright provides a comical illustration about imitating God, as he writes about a father who went away on a business trip. *[pause]*

‘When I’m away,’ he said [to his oldest son], ‘I want you to think what I would normally do around the house, and you do it for me.’ *[pause]*

He had in mind, of course, clearing up in the kitchen, washing up dishes, putting out the garbage, and similar tasks. *[pause]*

*On his return, he asked his wife what the son had done. [pause]*

‘Well,’ she said, ‘it was very strange...

*Straight after breakfast he made himself another cup of coffee, went into the living room, and put on some loud music, and read the newspaper for half an hour.’ [pause]*

The father was left wondering whether his son had obeyed him a bit *too* accurately.”<sup>1</sup> *[pauseeeee]*

*We all imitate people, but it’s important who we imitate, isn’t it? [pause]*

*Well what does our passage teach us today about what we are to do, and who we are to imitate?...*

### **I. We are to imitate God.**

Verse 1 says, “Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children.” *[pause]*

*Now what does the “therefore” refer to? [pause]*

Ever since Paul started chapter 4, he has been teaching us to “walk in a manner worthy” of our calling.

*That is, Paul has been telling us how we are to live as those saved, adopted, forgiven, and called by God. [pauseeee]*

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<sup>1</sup> Original Source: N. T. Wright, *Matthew for Everyone, Part 1*, page 50. Found at: [https://illustrationideas.bible/imitation/?utm\\_source=chatgpt.com](https://illustrationideas.bible/imitation/?utm_source=chatgpt.com). (Slightly edited by me.)

We are not to live like those who don't know Christ, but we are to live in a way that reflects our new identity in Christ.

And that means that there are certain things we must “put off” and certain things we must “put on.” *[pauseee]*

Paul highlighted that this way of life should impact how we speak, how we handle anger, and how we work. *[pauseee]*

Then Paul ended chapter 4 by saying, “Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.” *[pause]*

So this therefore could be a summary of the way of life that we are called to—how we live should be grounded in and shaped by *love*.

But the ‘therefore’ may be there for another, more immediate reason. *[pausee]*

Paul just highlighted God's forgiveness of us, so now after dwelling upon God's forgiveness, therefore, imitate Him and walk in love. *[pauseeee]*

When you truly come to grasp the forgiveness of God in Christ for you, your life starts to overflow with love.

So in light of God's amazing forgiveness: imitate Him! *[pauseee]*

Now what does it mean to be an imitator? *[pause]*

An imitator is someone who copies or mimics the behavior or character of someone else. *[pause]*

Think of an Elvis impersonator—they seek to look like, sound like, and act like Elvis.

But in a much greater, deeper way, Paul is calling us to “be imitators of God.” *[pauseee]*

We are to copy and mimic Him.

In the way that we think, act, and live, we ought to resemble God, reflecting His likeness to others. *[pauseeee]*

This is what we were always supposed to do from the beginning, for Adam and Eve were created in the image of God.<sup>2</sup> *[pause]*

They were supposed to reflect Him in the world, but of course, sin marred that in many ways.

But now, we were told back in chapter 4, verse 24 that the new self is “created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.” *[pauseee]*

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<sup>2</sup> A reference to Genesis 1:27.

So in Christ, we can reflect God way more accurately than we used to! *[pauseeee]*

Let me be clear—this imitation of God is not imitating His incommunicable attributes.

Meaning, we can't copy His ability to be all-present or all-knowing, but we can mimic to some extent His love, grace, mercy, truthfulness, patience, and goodness. *[pauseeee]*

This is what we are to “be.” *[pause]*

We are to *be* imitators of God, and that means this ought to be an ongoing and developing state for us. *[pauseeee]*

So many people want to *be* cool, to *be* popular, to *be* rich or famous, but God says, “Be an imitator of Me!” *[pauseeee]*

How much time and effort do you take to be successful or to be liked, compared with the time and effort you take to be an imitator of God? *[pauseeee]*

How radically our lives could change if *that* was our daily goal! *[pauseeee]*

There are some people who wake up and what drives them throughout the whole day is to be rich or to be the next this or that.

But when we wake up, what drives us should be to be imitators of our God—this is God's command to us. *[pauseeee]*

So many in our day fawn over celebrities. *[pause]*

They want to be like them, and so they try to copy what they dress like, what products they use, and even how they speak.

But we are to be those whose lives look more like the Lord of Heaven and Earth than the celebrity from Los Angeles or New York. *[pause]*

Lord, may it never be the other way around! *[pauseeee]*

When we seek to imitate someone, usually it's someone higher than us, smarter than us, more godly than us.

Well who is higher than our God? *[pause]*

Why seek to mimic those of this world, who don't even know Christ?

No, we look up to our God, and we say, “Show me how to live!” *[pauseeee]*

God wants us to live a lifestyle that reflects His character.

Therefore, we are to all be like mini-mirrors, reflecting our God in this world. *[pauseeee]*

Wouldn't it be great, if we could all say like Paul, "Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ"<sup>3</sup>?  
[pause]

To imitate God means that we will be those who "do not imitate evil but imitate good,"<sup>4</sup>  
patterning our life after our God. [pause]

We also "walk in the same way in which [Christ] walked."<sup>5</sup>

And since the Lord is holy, so we are to be holy,<sup>6</sup> and we seek to be merciful, even as our Father is merciful.<sup>7</sup> [pauseeee]

So Paul tells us to imitate God, but he adds that we are to do so "as beloved children." [pauseeee]

Children often copy or mimic what their parents say or do. [pause]

If you have kids, I'm sure you've experienced this before...

You watch your child do something, and you realize, "I do that all the time!" [pause]

Or you hear them say something and you think, "I always say that!" [pause]

It can be cute and funny, as long as it's not copying something that you do that's not so good.

Well, as children of God, we are to copy our Father in Heaven. [pause]

There's nothing wrong or sinful that He does that we could be caught copying, but in any way that we imitate Him, it is always right and good.

So like beloved children, imitate God. [pauseeee]

The Bible tells us that in love we have been adopted as sons through Jesus Christ.<sup>8</sup>

In fact, everyone who believes in Him is given the right to become children of God.<sup>9</sup> [pause]

We are His beloved children, so let's mimic our Father, who loves us so much! [pauseeee]

You see, loved children don't imitate their parents out of fear or guilt, or to gain something in return.

Loved children imitate because they are loved—they WANT to! [pause]

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<sup>3</sup> 1 Corinthians 11:1.

<sup>4</sup> 3 John 11.

<sup>5</sup> 1 John 2:6.

<sup>6</sup> A reference to 1 Peter 1:14–16.

<sup>7</sup> Luke 6:36.

<sup>8</sup> A reference to Ephesians 4b–5.

<sup>9</sup> A reference to John 1:12.

They feel safe, they look up to their parents, and want to follow in the footsteps of the ones who love them so much. *[pause]*

So also, we are *so* loved by God—do you realize that, Christian? *[pause]*

You are a beloved child of God, if you have trusted in Christ.

You are dearly loved, valued, and prized. *[pause]*

John rejoices and says in 1 John 3, “See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are”!<sup>10</sup> *[pauseeee]*

Due to the great privilege of being His, due to His great grace, due to His immense love, we imitate! *[pause]*

How could we not strive to be like the One who loves us so much? *[pauseeee]*

We are beloved children of God Most High, just think of it! *[pause]*

We, who were enemies and rebels of God due to our sin against Him, are now called beloved children because of Christ.

And to think that we can imitate and reflect God even in some limited ways, even in small glimpses, is astounding in itself. *[pauseeee]*

So Christian: “be imitators of God, as beloved children,” but what’s a prime way that we can do that? *[pause]*

*That’s what we will find out next, as we see that...*

## **II. We are to imitate Christ’s love.**

Paul just told us that we are to be imitators of God, and now verse 2 says, “and walk in love.” *[pause]*

So following the flow of the verses, Paul is basically saying, “Be imitators of God, and walk in love.”

And that means that walking in love is a prime way to imitate God. *[pauseeee]*

Paul doesn’t leave us in the dark as to a way that we can imitate God, but he gives it to us plain and clear—a key way to imitate God is to love. *[pauseeee]*

Now what does it actually mean to “walk in love”? *[pause]*

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<sup>10</sup> 1 John 3:1.

We don't always talk this way about things, meaning, we don't often say, "walk in power," or "walk in patience," when talking to someone.

But when it comes to the Bible, "walking," is a normal term used to speak of one's way of life or lifestyle. *[pause]*

So to "walk in love" then is to live your life in love. *[pause]*

It is to live a life that is characterized by love.

It's like your life is shaped by love and love flows out of you. *[pauseeee]*

So this isn't someone saying, "I was loving once!" or "I'm loving once in a while," but it's someone whose life is pervaded by love. *[pauseeee]*

This isn't to say that it's a life of loving perfection, but it's more so the general and overall nature of your life is one of love towards others. *[pauseeeee]*

Let me give you an example from Scripture about what it looks to walk in love or not walk in love. *[pause]*

In Romans 14, Paul is talking about how there are some believers who view eating food sacrificed to idols as wrong, and others who think it's fine to do. *[pause]*

In talking to the people who think it's fine to eat, he says, "If your brother is grieved by what you eat, you are no longer *walking in love*."<sup>11</sup> *[pauseeee]*

So Paul is saying that if you intentionally eat this meat in front of someone who sees it as wrong, you grieve that person and in some ways you are hurting their faith. *[pause]*

That's not "walking in love."

For to walk in love in that instance would be to lay down your personal rights for someone else, for you know that they think it's wrong to eat that meat.

So you sacrifice your personal desires and liberties, so that someone else doesn't stumble. *[pause]*

You do it out of love for, care for, and concern for someone else. *[pauseeeee]*

That gives us an example of a life lived in love—it's a life that is considerate of others, willing to sacrifice for others and their good. *[pauseeeee]*

Christians are to be people who live lives of love. *[pause]*

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<sup>11</sup> Romans 14:15a.

When others think of us, they shouldn't think, "That guy is all about himself," but they should think, "Wow, they are so loving to me in so many ways." *[pauseeee]*

Do you "walk in love"? *[pause]*

Would you say that your life is shaped by love and so exudes it? *[pause]*

How do you treat your family members, your co-workers, or other church members? *[pauseeee]*

Too often we are way more concerned with living in other ways...

We think, "I want to live a life characterized by being cool." *[pause]*

Or we think, "I want to live a life characterized by being beautiful." *[pause]*

Or, "I want to live a life that signals that I am successful or confident."

But how often is your aim, "I want to live a life of love"? *[pauseeeee]*

Now you may say, "Well all types of people want a life of love," and I would say, "Yes, but they do not often realize what true love is." *[pauseeeee]*

When some people think of living a life of love, they think only of the pleasant parts of love. *[pause]*

They think a life of love is a life of spectacular, 24/7 romantic love with their significant other with no hardships, like they were in some Hallmark movie or something. *[pause]*

They think of themselves looking all nice with a smile on their face handing out turkeys to a person in need in a pleasant, peaceful environment. *[pause]*

But a life of love doesn't always look that pleasant, as if it were the cover of a magazine, or a perfectly-crafted Instagram post. *[pauseeeee]*

Walking in love isn't living a life that is airbrushed, wrinkle-free, perfectly lit, with some beautiful background music. *[pause]*

Walking in love looks like serving someone all day long, everyday, as they struggle through a health problem, even though you'd rather be doing something else. *[pause]*

It looks like patience and grace when your toddler is throwing a complete fit. *[pause]*

It looks like giving a listening ear and some advice to someone, who continually needs you, and often takes up a lot of your time. *[pause]*

It looks like extending forgiveness to someone who hurt you very deeply. *[pauseeeee]*

There are no perfectly-timed, beautifully-edited photos to display. *[pause]*

There is no applause heard, but it can be hard, uncomfortable, messy, and no one may even know or see it all.

But that's walking in love. *[pauseee]*

Our world doesn't lift up true love, but it lifts up an incorrect, sugarcoated, and sanitized picture of love. *[pause]*

The world shows you only the highlight reel of love—showing only the good times, but not the times of hardship, pain, and sacrifice. *[pauseeee]*

And what's ironic is this...

In a world that proclaims love from the rooftops, we have people divorcing one another left and right, and often praised for it. *[pause]*

In a world that declares love as such an important quality, we also have them all about killing innocent babies in the womb for the “inconvenience” or “hardship” that having a baby may present. *[pause]*

In a world that sings the glories of love, we also have messages telling us to cut off toxic people from our lives. *[pause]*

That is not love—that is a deformed and skewed version of love that is not genuine love. *[pauseeee]*

True love doesn't say, “I'll love you, when it's enjoyable,” or “I'll help you out, if it's easy.”

For true love is sacrificial and giving, even when it's hard, uncomfortable, or inconvenient. *[pauseeee]*

We see this when Paul tells us how we are to walk in love by giving us the foremost example of love: Jesus Christ. *[pause]*

He says, “Walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.” *[pauseeee]*

Paul gives us the full *how* and *why* of our love. *[pauseeee]*

There's a story of “President Calvin Coolidge [inviting] some people from his hometown to dinner at the White House. *[pause]*

Since they did not know how to behave at such an occasion, they thought the best policy would be just to do what the President did. *[pauseeee]*

The time came for serving coffee. *[pause]*

The President poured his coffee into a saucer, [and] as soon as the home folks saw it, they did the same. [pause]

The next step for the President was to pour some milk and add a little sugar to the coffee in the saucer—the home folks did the same. [pause]

They thought for sure that the next step would be for the President to take the saucer with the coffee and begin sipping it, but the President didn't do so.

[Rather] he leaned over, placed the saucer on the floor and called the cat.”<sup>12</sup> [pauseee]

You see, imitation is important, but when it comes to imitation, it's important to know *why* you are imitating them. [pause]

Those people just imitated the president without knowing why they were doing so, but we know *why* we are to imitate Christ...

We imitate Christ, for He gives us the prime example of love. [pauseeee]

Jesus' death for us is the main teacher of what love is.

And that's why 1 John 3:16 says, “*By this we know love*, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers.” [pauseeee]

Jesus' giving of Himself on the cross is the supreme example of what true love is, and that means that to love *is* to sacrificially give to another. [pauseeee]

You can't say that you love someone, if you do absolutely nothing for them. [pause]

Paul says that, “Christ loved us and gave himself up for us.”

Both are true, for they are connected! [pause]

He gave himself up for us, but why? Because He loved us! [pauseeee]

This teaches us that love is active—it doesn't sit back and do nothing, but it acts in service for another.

Jesus loved *us* and gave himself up *for us*. [pauseeee]

It was for our sake, for our good, and on our behalf that Jesus died. [pauseeee]

He wasn't thinking of Himself alone, but He thought of us in love, and died for us.

He did the giving, the sacrifice, the work, and we did the receiving—now that's love! [pauseeee]

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<sup>12</sup> Unknown Source: Found at: [https://www.sermonillustrations.com/a-z/i/imitation.htm?utm\\_source=chatgpt.com](https://www.sermonillustrations.com/a-z/i/imitation.htm?utm_source=chatgpt.com).

Jesus “gave himself up,” which means that He voluntarily handed himself over to death for us. *[pause]*

He sacrificed His life in love, relinquishing His rights and comforts for our good. *[pauseeee]*

We deserved death, but He stood in the gap and took it for us.

He became the offering and sacrifice that we needed to atone for our sins. *[pauseeee]*

We sinned against the holy God and deserved to die eternally in Hell, yet Christ became the substitutionary sacrifice that was slain for us to wipe away our sin and guilt before God. *[pause]*

The Bible says Christ “has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.”<sup>13</sup>

And now through repentance of our sin and faith in Him, we are justified in God’s sight, redeemed from sin and death, and given new life. *[pauseeeee]*

His sacrifice was not ineffective, but rather, it was “a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.” *[pause]*

The language of a fragrant offering or sacrifice is language that means that the sacrifice was pleasing and acceptable to the Lord. *[pause]*

Think about how a sweet aroma is pleasing to you, so also, it’s symbolic of the offering being pleasing to the Lord and so acceptable and effective. *[pauseeee]*

If the Old Testament sacrifices met the righteous requirements of God, they were said to be a fragrant offering to God.<sup>14</sup> *[pauseeee]*

This all shows us that Jesus’ sacrifice for us was completely accepted and pleasing to God, and that means that it was 100% fully effective on our behalf! *[pause]*

We are truly forgiven through His perfect, love-induced sacrifice, and so His act of love was displayed, it worked, and it was complete. *[pauseeee]*

Do you realize what this implies for us? *[pause]*

It shows us that when we reflect Christ’s loving sacrifice, which was a pleasing aroma to God, then our acts of love are a pleasing aroma to God, too.<sup>15</sup> *[pause]*

He delights in our love for one another! *[pause]*

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<sup>13</sup> Hebrews 9:26b.

<sup>14</sup> See Genesis 8:20–21 and Exodus 29:18 as two examples among others.

<sup>15</sup> Interestingly, Paul uses the same language of a fragrant offering when talking about the monetary gift from the Philippians in Philippians 4:18.

He not only wants us to walk in love, but He *delights* in it—it's pleasing to Him.

It reflects who He is, and it reflects what Christ has done for us. *[pauseeee]*

We are to love as Christ loved us, which is sacrificially and generously, so are *you* walking in love? *[pauseee]*

Everyone likes to proclaim that they are a loving person, and no one wants to admit that they aren't loving, yet are you? *[pauseeee]*

God shows us here that a way to evaluate if you are walking in love is to see if your life reflects the gospel. *[pauseeee]*

Do you love like Jesus? *[pause]*

I'm not talking about the *extent* of His love, for we could never get close to that.

I'm talking about the *example* of His love—do you love sacrificially like Him? *[pauseeee]*

Do you love when it's hard? *[pause]*

Do you love when it takes the sacrifice of your time, money, or energy? *[pause]*

Do you love when it's uncomfortable, inconvenient, and even when the other person isn't the most pleasant? *[pauseeee]*

When we do this, we reflect Christ's love for us, for it wasn't easy for Him to go to the Cross. *[pause]*

It took the sacrifice of His time, energy, and ultimately the sacrifice of His life. *[pause]*

It was uncomfortable as He suffered on a cross of wood.

And He did all of this even though we weren't the most pleasant, for we were enemies of God, sinners in need of mercy. *[pauseeeee]*

*Let's be those who imitate Christ's love, for what we see this morning is that...*

**Greatly loved by God in Christ, we are to imitate Him and His love.**

Sometimes when you look at a child, you think, "They are just like their father," or "they are just like their mother." *[pause]*

I've heard people say of one of my kids, "They are like a little Matt!" and we even have the saying, "Like father, like son." *[pause]*

So also, we are to imitate and look like the Lord in His kindness, compassion, forgiveness, love, and many more ways. *[pauseeee]*

Through Christ, we are His beloved children, so may we look like our Father! *[pause]*

We don't do this to gain our standing with Him, but we do it as *beloved children* already—"we love because he first loved us."<sup>16</sup> *[pauseee]*

And where do we see that love on full display? The cross. *[pause]*

There Jesus gave himself up, laying His life down for us.

And now I live for and love like the One "who loved me and gave himself for me."<sup>17</sup> *[pauseee]*

His death on the cross is our model for how we are to love, but it is also our motivation.

So will you "walk in love" reflecting your Lord and Savior?

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<sup>16</sup> 1 John 4:19.

<sup>17</sup> Galatians 2:20.