Imitating Jesus

Ephesians 5:1-7 \ 1 Corinthians 4:16 \ 1 Cor. 11:1

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Back in the 90’s there was a phrase that caught fire and even trinkles around today...” What Would Jesus Do or WWJD. This sentiment is a caution to make decisions and live one's life in the same way that Jesus Christ would. The actual phrase “What Would Jesus Do” is actually much older than the 90’s. It was coined by a minister in Topeka, Kansas in 1886, Reverend Charles Sheldon

Do you remember annoying people when you would copy what they’d say or do. It was a game. I used to be a big wrestling fan and I remember watching it and imitating the wrestlers we had just watched, and as I did, my actions, my attitude, and even speech would change to become like that person I was imitating.

As I grew up, I noticed something in my life...In some ways I would be told by Pen that someway I said something, or a facial expression would look or act like my dad. They would be done without even thinking on them.

What I have described is exactly what we are to do with God. Paul tells us in our scripture text to be imitators (or copiers) of God as dear children. When we do this, we take on his character, His compassion, and all that comes with Him.

* **Ephesians 5:1-7 -** *Imitate God, therefore, in everything you do, because you are his dear children.****2****Live a life filled with love, following the example of Christ. He loved us and offered himself as a sacrifice for us, a pleasing aroma to God.* ***3****Let there be no sexual immorality, impurity, or greed among you. Such sins have no place among God’s people.****4****Obscene stories, foolish talk, and coarse jokes—these are not for you. Instead, let there be thankfulness to God.****5****You can be sure that no immoral, impure, or greedy person will inherit the Kingdom of Christ and of God. For a greedy person is an idolater, worshiping the things of this world.* ***6****Don’t be fooled by those who try to excuse these sins, for the anger of God will fall on all who disobey him.****7****Don’t participate in the things these people do.*

What does Eph 5:1 mean when Paul exhorts or urges us to, “*Imitate God, therefore, in everything you do*?

* Should we try to be omnipresent (everywhere at once), as God is?
* Should we try to create the universe?
* Should we try and be in everyone business? (JK)

So, what does it mean imitate God? The context is very specific how we should imitate God.

* Live a life filled with love, loving one another, just as Christ sacrificially loved us (Eph 5:2).

Paul had been calling for the Ephesians to put off the clothing of anger, dishonesty, unwholesome words, etc., and to put on godly characteristics like truthfulness, kindness, and forgiveness. These are clothes fitting for believers.

In this passage, Paul calls believers to “be imitators of God” (Eph 5:1). Mimētēs (“imitator”) is the word from which we get “mimic”— someone who copies specific characteristics of another person. So, Paul is telling us to “mimic God”—seeking to be just like him.

It’s not only Paul who tells us this. Other places in scripture commands it.

* Jesus says in Matt. 5:47-48, *“If you are kind only to your friends, how are you different from anyone else? Even pagans do that. 48 But you are to be perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect.*
* Peter says in 1 Peter 1:15-16, *“But now you must be holy in everything you do, just as God who chose you is holy. 16 For the Scriptures say, “You must be holy because I am holy.”*

God calls us to be just like himself. This is how God created humanity—in his own image. At the fall of man that image was marred but not destroyed. As discussed in previous discussions, we know that at conversion, God begins to transform us back into his image.

* Colossians 3:10 says, “*Put on your new nature, and be renewed as you learn to know your Creator and become like him*.
  + God is daily renewing us back into his perfect image
* Rom 8:29a - *For God knew his people in advance, and he chose them to become like his Son*

We also have a role to play in this transformation

* Philippians 2:12-13 Paul writes: “*Dear friends, you always followed my instructions when I was with you. And now that I am away, it is even more important. Work hard to show the results of your salvation, obeying God with deep reverence and fear. 13 For God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases him.*

So how should we imitate God? How can we live like God while residing among the ungodly?

* Ephesus was a place of tremendous immorality, where orgies were held in the temple of the goddess, Diana. It was difficult for the Ephesians to imitate God while living among pagans, and it is hard for us as well.

**We Imitate God by Recognizing that We Are His Children**

Here Paul uses terminology every person can relate to—that of being a child. There are many things we can learn about imitating God from the fact that he calls believers “dearly loved children.”

* As dearly loved children, we must recognize that God’s nature is already in us in order to imitate him.
  + It’s natural to believe that being like God is impossible. However, it is not. Because we are his children, we have the DNA of our Father. Remember at conversion, he gave us his nature. A new nature.
    - 2nd Peter 1:3-4 says, “*By his divine power, God has given us everything we need for living a godly life. We have received all of this by coming to know him, the one who called us to himself by means of his marvelous glory and excellence. 4 And because of his glory and excellence, he has given us great and precious promises. These are the promises that enable you to share his divine nature and escape the world’s corruption caused by human desires.”*

God gives us everything we need to be like him—we each participate in his divine nature.

* 2nd Corinthians 5:17 says, “*This means that anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun!”*

Therefore, God’s command to be like him is a recognition of who we are as his children. Because we are his children, God gave us his Holy Spirit to empower and change us into his image. By his Spirit, we put sin to death in our lives, and by his Spirit we cry out to God, calling him, “Abba Father”. In a way that we take on characteristics of our earthy parents in actions, things we say or how we say it, attitudes, etc... As God’s children we possess His very nature and characteristics, which is a process enabling us to conform to his very image.

**We imitate God by constantly watching Him**

My grandson Jackson is a parrot now. Couple of days ago I was watching Penny look at the back of her show and Jax just happened to be right by her and started looking at his shoe like her. We’ve all seen it when a child will mimic his/her mom or Dads walk or talk to imitate him. They “study” them to become them...In the same way a child studies their parents, we must study God.

* Hebrews 12:2a says, “Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith,

To watch God, we must study God. We must study how Jesus dealt with difficult people, how he loved, how he had compassion, how he forgave...We do this through reading and applying his Word to our hearts DAILY!

* We see nowhere in the Bible where Christ was involved sexual immorality or was greedy. We don’t see Him telling obscene stories or talk trash about someone, telling crude jokes*.*

If we’re truly wanting to be like Christ, we need to be like Christ in every way, not just certain ways.

**We imitate God by constantly abiding in God**

When we hang around a person often, their character can starts to rub off on us. We’ll start saying something they say or pick up a habit they heave. It’s the same with God.

* We must be constantly in prayer & His Word—enjoying his presence.
* We must fellowship often with his people—where He is present (Matt 18:20 - *For where two or three gather together as my followers, I am there among them*.”).
* We must worship Him constantly, as God inhabits the praises of his people

As we spend time with God, he changes us into his image

* 2 Cor 3:18 - *So all of us who have had that veil removed can see and reflect the glory of the Lord. And the Lord—who is the Spirit—makes us more and more like him as we are changed into his glorious image.*

Let this be true of us so we can continue to grow into his image.

Closing:

The Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians actually urges Christians to “imitate him” or to “be imitators of him.”

* 1 Corinthians 4:16: “I urge you, then, be imitators of me.”
* 1 Corinthians 11:1 he writes again “Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.”

Now it strikes me as the very height of arrogance for a man to exhort others to be like him and to imitate him, yet Paul wrote those words under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Why? Because Paul was so convinced that what he is doing is right and godly, that he urges others to imitate him. The reference in 11:1 makes it clear that he seeks to imitate Christ and urges others to imitate Christ by imitating him.

* Matthew Henry in his commentary explains these words in this way: “Follow me as far as I follow Christ. Come up as close as you can to my example in those instances wherein, I endeavor to copy after His pattern. Be my disciples, as far as I manifest myself to be a faithful minister and disciple of Christ, and no further. I would not have you be my disciples, but his.”

Church we should wish to model a life that our kids, our spouses, our family, our friends, and anyone we come in contact with can imitate; We should have that same desire Paul did and be able to say to them, “Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.”

* They should see in us a life of godliness, holiness, and difference than this world shows. (i.e., our words, our actions, the way respond to situations.) Our character should reflect that of Christs and should cause them to desire and want to change as well.
* They should see our love for God is real and that He is 1st in our lives and as we spend time daily with Him.
* They should see that you, as Christ does, carry with in us an Agape love for them, that we possess a love for Gods people, the church, and that you love even the ones who have hurt you and you show true forgiveness.

Imitating Christ is not easy. In fact, without the Holy Spirits help, it’s impossible. But we can rest in the fact that every day we walk with Christ that if we will learn of His ways, study His character, and be an example of His love, then we will begin to inherit and imitate His ways in word, deed, thought, and action, making it to the point that we “reflect Christ” so others will see Jesus’ character more in our life than they see our character. In doing this others will desire to also imitate Christ!

Are you imitating God as his dearly loved child? In what ways do you need to imitate Jesus more?