

THE GOSPEL MESSAGE

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Imitators of God

Tad Morris

As a young Christian, I became very interested in the doctrines of the Church. I analyzed them enthusiastically. I studied Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, and the other letters, looking for laws and procedures the Church should follow. But in all of this studying, somehow, I neglected to study God himself. I imagine others have made this mistake. I was trying to be a servant of God without knowing God, trying to be a Christian without knowing Christ, trying to perfect the procedures of the Church without understanding the Lord of the Church.

Christians are not defined by the procedures they follow but by the Person they follow. This must be the predominant motive in the Christian's mind. So Paul says in **Ephesians 5:1**, "Therefore be imitators of God as dear children." The high calling of a Christian is to imitate God. Be like God. Literally, to mimic God.

What does it mean to imitate God? The meaning of this calling is in the context. **Ephesians 4:32-5:2**:

And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Christ forgave you. (5:1) Therefore be imitators of God as dear children. (2) And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet-smelling aroma.

In our relationships with other people, we're to imitate God in our motives, thoughts, behavior, and speech. We're to treat people like God treats people.

In what specific ways should I imitate God?

LOVING LIKE GOD

Paul says to love as Jesus loves us. This is an other-worldly way of living and loving. So Jesus explains in **Matthew 5:43-48**:

You have heard that it was said, "You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy." (44) But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, (45) that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and

on the unjust. (46) For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? (47) And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so? (48) Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.

There's nothing special or divine about loving people who love me. There's nothing special or divine about geniality towards my friends.

The divine love that we must imitate is contrary to human nature. God blesses everyone. God loves undeserving people. God calls us to love in the same way – loving undeserving people (like us), loving unjust people (like we used to be).

MERCIFUL LIKE GOD

In a related passage, Jesus explains how Christians should imitate the mercy of God. **Luke 6:32-36**:

But if you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. (33) And if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. (34) And if you lend to those from whom you hope to receive back, what credit is that to you? For even sinners lend to sinners to receive as much back. (35) But love your enemies, do good, and lend, hoping for nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High. For He is kind to the unthankful and evil. (36) Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful.

There's nothing special or divine about lending money to people who will pay me back. But when we give with no expectation of getting back, then we're imitating God. When we love our enemies, then we're acting like God. When we show mercy to evil people, then we're reflecting the character of God.

HOLY LIKE GOD

Is there any area of the Christian life that shouldn't imitate the character of God? **1 Peter 1:13-16**:

Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; (14) as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance; (15) but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, (16) because it is written, "Be holy, for I am holy."

As kids, when we would misbehave, we used to deflect guilt by saying: "Well, you know, I'm not Jesus. I can't be perfect."

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Adults can have this attitude too. We forgive ourselves for being human. We happily consent to our flaws because we know we won't be perfect. That's not the attitude of a Christian. We want to be like God, and we must not make excuses for our failures.

AS DEAR CHILDREN

Imitating God is not a robotic process. We mimic God in the same way a beloved child imitates his or her parents. We imitate God with adoration, not grudgingly, hesitantly, or bitterly. We imitate God because we want to, not only with a sense of duty and obligation but also with fondness and adoration, with complete trust, knowing that we are precious children of God.

How is this high calling attainable? Because we have been infused with the nature of God our Father. **Romans 8:13-14:** "For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. (14) For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God."

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Bloom Where You Are...and Grow!

Dan Huff

Recently we were studying Joseph, one of the twelve sons of Jacob. As we were studying, I realized we didn't know much about Joseph's younger years until **Genesis 37**, when he was already seventeen years old. Betrayed and sold into slavery by his brothers and taken down to Egypt, he was thrust into servitude -- a stranger and a foreigner in a land with customs, religion, and laws that he was not familiar with. He faithfully served his master, Potiphar, who saw that the Lord was with Joseph. This had to be a most trying dilemma for Joseph, but he dug down and was rooted in God, blooming where he was!

When Potiphar's wife made passes at Joseph, he answered her, "*How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?*" (**Genesis 39:9b**). Again, we see that Joseph's mind and heart were doing what was right, pleasing God. On an opportune occasion, she came after him, grabbed his outer garment, and he fled, leaving behind his outer garment, which Potiphar's wife clung to (see **1 Corinthians 6:18**). She schemed against Joseph and lied to her husband with false accusations against him: a foreigner and a slave. Who would Potiphar listen to, his wife or a slave? Joseph's master had him thrown into prison or a dungeon (**Genesis 41:14**). Joseph found himself a man without a country, far away from his family. Where could He go but to the Lord?

Here was Joseph's character and integrity revealed — under the fire of temptation and trials. He could have shouted, "This is not fair!" Many of us might be tempted to cry out, "Why me, Lord?" "Lord, I was trying to please you?" "What did I do to deserve this?" In the prime of his youth, Joseph was either a slave or a prisoner in Egypt for thirteen years (**Genesis 37:2; 41:46**). But what did Joseph do? He trusted God and again dug down, deep-rooted in God, and served where he was. Spiritually Joseph bloomed and grew—even under most difficult circumstances. He focused on what he knew was the right thing to do and did what he could. Joseph is a great example of faithfully persevering even under most adverse conditions.

After Jesus' resurrection, He spent some time with His disciples. During this time, Jesus told Peter that another would dress him and take him places that he didn't wish to go when he was older. The Scriptures say, "*signifying by what death he would glorify God.*" Peter saw John standing nearby and asked, "*But Lord, what about this man?*" Jesus said to him, "*If I will that he remain till I come, what is that to you? You follow Me*" (**John 21:18-22**). We live in a competitive world, and often our nature

is to look at others and ask, "What about him or her?" Jesus said we need to look at ourselves. Our job, our place, is to follow Him!

Later, Paul said it is not wise to compare ourselves with one another or measure ourselves by one another (**2 Corinthians 10:12**). Why? I am not THE Standard, nor can anyone else qualify to be THE Standard; there is One: Jesus Christ the Righteous! Follow Him! He is the One we must each strive to mold and shape our lives to be like "*conformed to the image of His Son...*" (**Romans 8:29**). "*As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving*" (**Colossians 2:6-7**). It is when we are following Him, rooted in Christ, that we can grow in faith and apply ourselves in His service!

Again, in considering Joseph's life, we see a willing spirit. There are a plethora of examples in the Scriptures of God working through those with willing spirits. "*For if there is first a willing mind, it is accepted according to what one has, and not according to what he does not have*" (**2 Corinthians 8:12**). Paul wrote this to the Corinthians pertaining to the collection for the saints on the first day of the week, encouraging them to complete the good work that they had started. However, this principle is true in all our service to God. God can and will work through those of willing minds, who will use what they have for His service and His glory, which is what we were created for (**Revelation 4:11**). But we often get all bent out of shape, centering our minds on what we do not have, rather than focusing on and using what God has blessed us with, including the various circumstances that we may find ourselves in.

As Joseph did, we can live our lives to His glory, learning, following, applying the examples of the faithful, and especially the example our Lord has given for us to follow! "*What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?*" (**Romans 8:31-32**). So, no matter what circumstances we find ourselves in, with His help, let us dig down deep, firmly root ourselves in the Lord, growing and developing and blooming where we are!

"Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God-- this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is-- his good, pleasing and perfect will" (**Romans 12:1-2**).



Please check your expiration date!

Glory to God!

The **Chapel Glen Church of Christ, Indianapolis, IN** rejoiced when **Brittany Owens** was baptized for the remission of her sins on August 29.

The church in **Kirksville, MO** was overjoyed when **Ally (Salter) Baker** was restored to fellowship with the Lord and with the congregation. **Jimmy Stewart** and **Ken Hendrickson** placed membership with the congregation. And the church joined the heavenly chorus in praise when **Michelle Hendrickson**, wife of Ken, was baptized on August 21.

Blessed Are the Dead

Lois Grace Anderson, 85, passed away on August 15, 2021. Sister Lois was born March 5, 1936, in Nixa, MO to parents, **James and Oleta Aven**. She confessed her belief in Jesus Christ and was immersed for the remission of her sins when she was twelve years old, and from that day she strived to be like Christ. She met **Gerry Dan Anderson** from Springfield, MO at Missouri State University in late 1955 and they were married Dec. 30, 1956 at the **Church of Christ in Nixa**. Lois was a Christian first and was a faithful member of the **Murray Road Church of Christ, Lee's Summit, MO**. This helped to strengthen her marriage with Gerry and her relationship with her children. Lois' love for all people was always evident in the hugs she gave, the hospitality she showed to young and old alike and the joy she found in her marriage of 64 years. Her home was always available for parties and for the Ladies' semi-monthly Bible studies. She was a wonderful example as a caregiver to other's children as well as her own, a teacher of ladies' bible studies and children's classes at church, a den mother for boy scouts and a girl scout leader; along with many other activities. Survivors include her children **Dan (Karen)** of Ashland, MO, **Jeff (Nancy)** of Claremont, CA, **Leta (Keith Fenton)** of Lone Jack, MO, **Andy (Katie)** of Pleasant Hill, MO, and sister **LuAnna Baysinger** of Nixa, MO. All 4 of her children are married to their original spouses producing twenty-one

grandchildren and five great-grandchildren, and two on the way.

Special Meetings

The **Rock Creek Church of Christ, Ottawa, KS** plans a **Youth Workshop** for high school through college age young men and women on **Saturday, November 6** from **10:00 am until 8:00 pm**. The congregation plans a spiritual focused study on Christian youth in today's world with both work and fun for young Christians. More information to follow.

2021 Meetings

- November 6.....Youth Workshop, Ottawa, KS
- December 28-30...Youth Rally, Gregory Blvd., Raytown, MO
- December 28-30.....College Study, Lone Jack, MO

The Gospel Message

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