

Natalie W. Bell
August 12, 2018

***Who Do You Imitate?
Ephesians 4:25-5:2***

25 So then, putting away falsehood, let all of us speak the truth to our neighbors, for we are members of one another. 26 Be angry but do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, 27 and do not make room for the devil. 28 Thieves must give up stealing; rather let them labor and work honestly with their own hands, so as to have something to share with the needy. 29 Let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only what is useful for building up,^[b] as there is need, so that your words may give grace to those who hear. 30 And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with which you were marked with a seal for the day of redemption. 31 Put away from you all bitterness and wrath and anger and wrangling and slander, together with all malice,³² and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ has forgiven you.^[c]

5¹ Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children,² and live in love, as Christ loved us^[a] and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

Our Pastor's Bible study was talking about what it means to imitate God, and then we got to talking about the new **Princess Meghan Markle**, and who she has to **imitate** (the Queen), and what she has to **learn** to become a member of the royal family.

It's pretty amazing actually.
Now that she's married, she's actually **in six months** of 'Princess training' to learn all the royal dos and don'ts.

Listen to just a few of the **rules and regulations** for a Princess:

Always sit with knees together and legs crossed at the ankle.
Always wear hose, no bare legs.
Always wave slowly and deliberately, without being too gregarious.
Greet royals with a curtsy,
and others with a firm handshake, only two pumps, and a smile.
Arrive with the royal family in order of succession to the throne.
And always be on time.

Never share a public opinion on politics or religion.
 And absolutely, no selfies. Ever.
 Any frowning, yawning, or gasping are strictly prohibited.

When it comes to *dining*,
 the Princess has to know all the different dishes and silverware,
 including things like the difference between a fish knife and a butter knife.
 She is only permitted to eat once the Queen begins to eat,
 and as soon as the Queen is finished,
 everyone else is to put their forks down as well.

Markle is also taking *speech* lessons
 to learn how to soften her American accent,
 and to start using British terminology.

She has been received into the Church of England,
 and has already learned the words to 'God Save the Queen'.
<https://www.cheatsheet.com/entertainment/these-are-the-rules-meghan-markle-is-learning-during-her-princess-lessons.html/>

Sounds a little *daunting* doesn't it?
Why would someone do all of that,
 why learn all the rules and regulations, and then live by them?
 Well, there's just one reason.
 Love.
 She does it out of love for her husband Prince Harry.
 And a new royal family.

Which brings us to Paul's message in Ephesians 4 and 5.
 And some words about a *new way of living*.
 And a *new role model*.

Who are your *role models*?
 What have they taught you—
 and what do you still want to learn from them?

We all have people in our lives,
 people who we *hope to imitate* in some way or another, don't we?

Kids are kind of naturally this way.
 You can see them imitating the adults all around them,
 Many times to our **chagrin**.

Ever had **your kids** doing the very thing
 you wish they wouldn't imitate from you?
 Only to ignore all the things you're actually trying to teach them?
 I bet you can think of a few things right now!

We **all imitate people** around us,
 And we all have people **who imitate us**—

We just tend to see it **so clearly in a child**—the looks and laughs,
 the movements and actions and words—
 that come straight from the people around them.
 It can be **pretty humbling!**

But **adults are the same** way, aren't we?
 Think of how you do some things around the house,
 from simple things like folding clothes, or loading the dishwasher,
 to more complicated things like fixing a car or sewing a quilt.
 Didn't you learn these things from someone else?

The problem is, sometimes we see our role models
 through **rose-colored glasses**.
 We admire and even idolize people, and then we run into a problem.
 Because people will fail us.
 Humans are human.
 Even leaders fail us all the time.
 Truth is, there **but for the grace of God goes each one of us**.

So **what are we called to do?**
 Well, Paul suggests we **imitate God**,
 Jesus Christ.
 Which to me, sounds like a great idea, and a very **tall order**.
 How on earth do we do that on a daily basis?

Paul lays it out for us, here in Ephesians 4 and 5,
 But we have to go back a little bit to verse 22 in Chapter 4:

You were taught to put away your former way of life, your **old self**, corrupt and deluded by its lusts,
23 and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds,
24 and to clothe yourselves with the **new self**, created according to the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness.

Put away your former life, **your old self**...
 We don't talk a lot about an old self.
 Is this when you didn't know Jesus?
 What if you don't remember not knowing Jesus?
 How do you put away your old self?

Or, what if it's more about how we **naturally** act,
 versus how we act **as followers of Christ**?
 What does it mean to clothe ourselves with the person Jesus wants us to be?
 Doesn't sound easy!
 So what if **Christ wants us to depend daily** upon Him for the new self?

Maybe putting away the old and putting on the new
 Needs to be a **daily decision**,
 Like putting on new clothes, or brushing our teeth.

The new self is not just new—it's based on **following Jesus**, and **Imitating God**.

And Paul talks specifically about what that entails.
 Listen to what we are called to **imitate in the life of Christ**:
 Verses 25 through 32 say some pretty powerful things like,

Speak the **truth**, because we are members of one another.
 Be **angry but do not sin**, and don't let the sun go down while you're angry.
 Don't **make room for evil**, for the devil in your life.
Work hard.
Don't speak evil, but only grace.
Don't grieve the Holy Spirit.
 Don't live in **bitterness or wrath or malice**.
 Be **kind, tenderhearted, forgiving**.

And finally in chapter 5 *Be imitators of God, as beloved children.*
Live in love as Christ loved us, and gave himself as a sacrifice.

These are all things we can **choose**, right?
 We can choose what to do with our **anger**,
 We can choose what to do with our **words**,
 We can choose what to do in our **hearts**,
 whether to be kind and forgiving,
 full of malice or full of grace.

And you know what?
God cares about this—God cares about how we live.
 Our church really emphasizes **grace**—which is wonderful---
 The world is such a cruel place,
 that church should be a place of grace.
 That's the power of the empty cross and the resurrected Christ,
 who died to forgive us and give us new life, and grace.

But sometimes we so emphasize grace
 that we forget how much **God cares about the choices** we make.
 God cares about **what we put into** our hearts, and minds, and bodies.
 God cares about what we watch on T.V. or the internet,
 God cares about what we read,
 God cares about what we hear, and speak, and learn.
 Do we think about that when you putting things into our heart, mind, and
 body?

This is not because God is out to condemn us.
 Jesus says specifically in John 3:17 that he did not come to condemn.
 But God knows, Jesus knows,
 that what **goes into** our lives
 affects what **comes out of** our lives.

And what did Jesus say was the **Greatest Commandment?**
 The most important thing for us to do?

***To love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength,
 and your neighbor as yourself.***

How can we do that if we allow sin and anger and hate,
 Or other garbage into our hearts and lives?
 How can we love God and neighbor if our hearts and minds are full of junk?
 We can't.

So of course ***God cares*** about the way we live.
 God loves us too much to ignore this.
 And it's not just about what we do on Sundays.
 Most of us can put on a good face on for Sunday,
 but Jesus cares about the rest of the week...
 all of the hours, of all of the days.
 Our ***ability to love God and one another*** depends on the way we live 24/7.

I've been reading a book called ***The Simple Faith of Mister Rogers*** by Amy Hollingsworth. I grew up with Mister Rogers, maybe some of you did too. I remember his calm and soothing voice, his compassion, grace,
 And acceptance of all his neighbors.
 I know that he's been parodied over the years,
 but he really made a positive impact on many lives.
 And he demonstrated the power of making ***good choices***.

Did you know he was a ***Presbyterian pastor***, who completed seminary while working on children's television?

And talk about a ***rich theology***, his entire program,
Mister Rogers' Neighborhood, was based on the Good Samaritan,
 and the Great Commandment: To love God and our neighbor as ourselves.
 While his show was not overtly Christian,
 it sure was on the inside, and in the heart of its creator.

Fred ***prayed each day*** that the Holy Spirit
 would help viewers to hear a Word from God.
 He believed that everyone was created in the image of God.

In the ***Neighborhood of Make Believe*** Fred Rogers had ***characters*** that reflected different aspects of human life and struggles,
 Daniel, King Friday, Lady Elaine Fairchild...
 and he helped them through the struggles that we all encounter,
 especially the tendency we all have to sin.

Forgiveness and grace were paramount for Fred Rogers, as was **guarding the hearts** of children, and adults.

Although he was a television celebrity, he **rarely watched** television himself, especially children's programs. One day after seeing his grandson watch a 'children's show' with guns and violence, and hearing his grandson justify it because the people being shot were 'bad guys', he decided to write a Public Service Announcement, and he sent it to local stations who would air it.

This is what he said:

"Some television programs are scary, with people shooting and hitting each other. Well, you can do something about that. When you see scary television like that, you can turn it off. And when you do turn it off, that will show you that you are the strongest of them all. It takes a very strong person to turn off scary TV."
See Amy Hollingsworth, *The Simple Faith of Mister Rogers*. (Nelson: Nashville, 2005), pg. 94.

Fred Rogers believed that we all **deal with negative**, even evil inclinations, but we have a **choice** in what to do with our feelings. We **can redirect** them into something constructive. He believed we can all make **good choices**.
See Amy Hollingsworth, *The Simple Faith of Mister Rogers*. (Nelson: Nashville, 2005), pg. 95.

Fred Rogers was a **pretty good person** to imitate, with his gift for seeing the good in people, and making good choices. But there's someone **far greater**.

The old slogan **WWJD** has been overused, but it's still a good one. What if we all stopped to think about *What Would Jesus Do?*

Paul also talks a lot about **light and dark** in his letters. He encourages us to live in the light. To live by the power of the Holy **Spirit** inside of us—the light. Instead of our **own ways**—the dark.

Light and dark.

That's a good way to think about what's going on in your life, isn't it? If your actions are something that have to be a secret,

if you would rather do them without anyone's knowledge,
 only in the dark...is that good?
 Or do you need to consider actions that are acceptable in the light?
 And in the body of Christ-- a place of accountability.

All this talk about living in the light,
 It's not the same as being legalistic.
 Christian life is not about just '**following the rules**'.

When Paul encourages us to imitate God, and Christ,
 he is encouraging us to have a **relationship with Jesus**
 where Jesus is our **guide, our mentor**,
 a person we admire and want to imitate.
 Just like most of us have had mentors in our lives—
 Paul is saying Jesus can be that for us.
 The Holy Spirit in our hearts can guide us in the ways of Jesus.

This is different than mere **book knowledge** about God,
 or following a set of **rules**.
 Some say a set of rules would actually be easier.
 But think about what you do **with the people you love and admire--**
 Is that how you imitate them?
 By just checking off some rules they give you?
 Or do you learn from a **relationship** with them?

Isn't it through **relationship** that we become a little more like the people we
 want to imitate?

And wouldn't that be true of Jesus?
 We could make a list of all the things the Bible tells me about Jesus
 that I should follow.
 Or I could **spend more time WITH Jesus--** in prayer, study, worship, and
 fellowship, and service,
 deepening my relationship with Him...and grow to be like Him.

Remember Jesus relationship with the **Pharisees**?
 These were the Jewish religious leaders of his day,
 the men who tried very hard to follow all 613 Levitical laws...

And Jesus had a **real problem** with them,
 and their desire to follow the letter of the law, but not the Spirit of it.
 He really **condemned them** for making a good show of trying to do good,
 but not actually living it in their hearts.
 He condemned them for looking good on the **outside**,
 but not being good on the **inside**.

You know, Jesus **didn't make a big fuss** about his virtue and grace,
 He didn't try to tell people how great he was.
 He just lived and loved.

And He **spent time with his heavenly Father**,
 In **relationship**, learning and growing in his own faith.
 Think of all the times
 he withdrew from the crowds to be alone and pray.
 He knew the power of not just doing what was right,
 But learning from His Father **how and why** he did what is right.

What if we did the **same**?
 Are we **spending time** with Jesus?
 Are we seeking to **imitate** his life?
 Are we wanting to **follow** in his footsteps?

The great thing is, we have **his whole story** in the scriptures.
 We have **his body** on earth, the body of Christ, the church.
 We have **his presence** in one another.
 We have **his Holy Spirit** in our hearts.

We **CAN imitate God—we can imitate Jesus**.
 If we are willing to **spend time** with Jesus...that's how it happens!

You know, the **new Princess** is learning how to live as a royal,
 by **spending a lot of time** with her new husband, and his family.

We can learn about living **as beloved children of God**,
 by **spending time with our Savior**, and the family of faith.

Friends, hear the ***Good News of the Gospel*** today:
We are called to be imitators of God, in Jesus Christ.
And we are given the freedom and power to do that
through a ***relationship*** with Him.
May we put away our old self,
and put on the new life given to us by Jesus.
And to that, all God's people said,
Amen.