

Walking Examples

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[0 : 00] We're going to read again at the beginning of chapter 5, these first two verses, but as you see the word, therefore, at the beginning of the verse, it links into what we read beforehand as well.

We can read again at chapter 5, verse 1. Therefore, be imitators of God as beloved children and walk in love as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice of God.

There's a wonderful phrase there in that opening verse that describes God's people as beloved children. And it's a great reminder to us as we gather together this evening and every time we gather to worship and come near to God that we are his beloved children.

So whatever else is going on in our lives and whatever else may be affecting us, we always have that assurance that we have a father in heaven who is with us and watches over us and desires for us to be walking closely with him.

And that theme is here in these verses, in the verses that we read both in beginning in chapter 4 at verse 17. And as we close our reading at the beginning of chapter 5, you see the word walk used in the opening verses and in the closing verses that we read.

[1 : 24] Now this I say and testify to the Lord that you must no longer walk as Gentiles do in the futility of their minds. So he's going on then to outline the areas where they have been distracted and led away.

Then as we come into chapter 5 in the opening verse there, he says, Therefore, be imitators of God as beloved children and walk in love as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice for God, to God.

There was a German by the name Albert Schweitzer. And he was a doctor, a medical doctor. He was a musician, but he was also a missionary for God too.

And he was once asked a question. He was asked the question, what's the best way to raise children? And he said in his answer, there are three ways, the best ways to raise children.

One, by example. Two, by example. And three, by example. Now to us it may sound, well there must be more to raising children than that.

[2 : 40] But he was highlighting just the importance of being an example to your children. And we are reminded here in these verses too that we have someone who is a great example to us.

Paul in his teaching, in his letters to the churches, so often speaks about examples. He describes himself as an example to follow in some places.

He also points to others who are good examples to follow. But above all, he's always pointing us to the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the greatest example of all.

And we see here that he is talking, God is talking to his church, his people, as his children. And as our walk with the Lord, as we go on in our development and our growth in faith, we are to walk as his children.

And God in his word gives us great examples and illustrations into how we are to grow. It's not just Paul saying, follow me, follow my examples.

[3 : 47] If he's boasting in himself. Even when he says that, he always turns it around to say, it is always through what he has learned through Christ Jesus as his Lord.

And so we want to surround ourselves in our own lives with good examples too. Because we live in a world where we are so often distracted.

And as Paul is writing here to this church in Ephesus, he's showing us here how many have been led away from God. He speaks there in verse 17, how they no longer walk as the Gentiles do in the futility of their minds.

They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to their hardness of heart. He's reminding us here just how easy it is to just turn cold towards God.

How easy it is to be pulled away from God and end up ourselves walking alienated from God. Walking in darkness once again. And so often the danger is that we are going on in our own strength.

[4 : 56] But we are always to go on in the strength of the Lord. And that's what he goes on to remind them in chapter 4 there in verse 24. To put on the new self, created after the likeness of God and through righteousness and holiness.

This is our ongoing walk with God. Put off all bitterness, wrath, malice, all these sins that so easily come into our hearts.

And we say to ourselves, you know, it's easier said than done. How often do we find ourselves caught out once again with all of these sins that he speaks about from our former life that are still there sort of clinging on to us?

Wrath, anger, malice, bitterness, jealousy. They're all there just fighting for our attention and pulling us away. And it's easier said than done.

But it's by focusing on the Lord that we always go on and walk closely with him. And so continually we ask ourselves, you know, are we walking closely?

[6 : 04] Are we going on in his strength? Where are we as Christians today? As we look back, as we come to the end of a year, where are we now compared to where we were at the start of the year?

As we look back to everything that's happened in this past year, are we giving thanks to God and really entrusting ourselves to him and looking back and saying, thank you, Lord, for giving me the strength each and every point.

Even when I felt I was going on in my own strength, I can look back and see it's only through your grace, through your strength that I came on. The times we knew we couldn't go on in our own strength, how he afforded us his strength.

And to be thankful for him. We're so often challenged, but we also need to be encouraged and to have our focus all the time on the Lord Jesus.

I've never been in a reading group just about a year ago, just now. Some of you may have been in it. It was organized by Thomas Davis, a men's reading group on Zoom.

[7 : 09] And going through it, we're reading a book together. And there's always a great challenge in the book as to just where we were at and how we were going on.

And one chapter in particular was focusing on the problems we so often face. And three things that we often struggle with. It was three questions.

What are we doing with our time? What are our greatest worries? And what are we willing to sacrifice? Questions that make us reflect.

But as we reflect on these questions, they will also bring us to refocus. Are we giving our time to the Lord? Are we casting our burdens, our worries on the Lord?

Are we seeing the sacrifice the Lord has done for us? And willing to sacrifice our time, our efforts for him? It always brings us back to focus on the remedy to all of these challenges is to look to the Lord Jesus.

[8 : 13] And so tonight, as we think of our own lives and look back and look forward, yes, we will see our lives marred by sin. But we're also reminded that in Christ, we are a new creation.

And that we are to go on in his strength, putting off the old self and putting on the new self, created after the likeness of God and through righteousness and holiness.

And that's what Paul goes on to outline for us there in chapter 5, verse 1 and verse 2. How do we go on? By example.

By example, by example, by example. And he gives us three examples here that we can just touch on this evening together in these verses.

The first example is be imitators of God. The second example is the example of love. Walk in love. And then the third example is the Lord Jesus Christ.

[9 : 15] As Christ has loved us and gave himself up for us. So we've got these three examples that Paul uses to help us to walk with the Lord.

So the first example we see is this imitate God. Be imitators of God. Have you ever been asked to do something and in your eyes it just seems impossible?

You think to yourself, I'm never going to be able to do that. We could all have maybe a different list of things we've either maybe been asked to do or been wanted to do ourselves.

We just felt, well, there's no way I'm going to be able to do that. In my life, I've had many experiences where I've come to a point and I just thought, there's no way I'm going to be able to do that.

Some things come to mind where we were with some young children taking them to a free church camp. We took them ice skating and I was hoping to just stay at the side.

[10 : 17] But oh no, we're told to come on to the ice. We're done the ice skates. I'm thinking to myself, there's no way I'm going to manage this. And I'm not going to make the Winter Olympics.

But once you get onto the ice and you start moving, you start maybe getting the hang of things. But it's only through doing it that you gain confidence in it. And it's the same with so many things.

When you first start driving, you're thinking to yourself, there's no way I'm going to get the hang of the clutch and the handbrake and maneuvering and mirrors. All of these things. But over time, through practice, you get the hang of it.

And the list could go on. But these are things that we think of. Well, we can work at that ourselves. We can be taught how to do that. It seems impossible initially.

But we learn as we go on. Well, here in verse 1 of chapter 5, we see something that our first response is, this is impossible.

[11 : 17] Therefore, be imitators of God. And you ask yourself, how can we possibly be this kind of Christian?

How can we possibly do this? Be imitators of God. We all know who God is. He is the creator of the universe. He has made us in his image.

We are made to worship him. How can we possibly be imitators of this God that we worship? It's not to be imitators that we take his place.

But that we look to the example that he has given and the teaching that he has given us. So instead of being put off by this, it should be our greatest desire to be imitators of God.

Because it is what the Lord asks of his children. As his children, we are to look to him and to what he shows us, what he has done for us.

[12 : 24] So in the Old Testament, God tells his people to be holy. We looked at this recently in 1 Peter, who quotes from Leviticus 19.

It says, speak to the entire assembly of Israel and say to them, be holy because I, the Lord your God, am holy. Each of you must respect his mother and father and you must observe my Sabbaths.

I am the Lord your God. So he says to be holy, but he gives us examples of how as well. He goes on, just some, each of you must respect his mother and father.

You must observe my Sabbaths, follow my commands, be imitators of God. And when you look at it here, the context of being imitators of God is, is on, the foundation is on forgiveness.

At verse 32 at the end of chapter 4, be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another as God in Christ forgave you.

[13 : 34] So that's the foundation of the, therefore, be imitators of God in this way. Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another as God forgave you.

That's where the therefore then comes in. So we are to be imitators of God, to show that we are walking with him.

C.H. Spurgeon once said, Man's life is always more forcible than his speech. When men take stock of him, they reckon his deeds as pounds and his words as pennies.

If his life and doctrine disagree, the mass of onlookers accept his practice and reject his preaching. So the importance of how we show ourselves as imitators of God, not just in what we say, but how we behave.

By being kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another as God in Christ forgave you. So this is something that we are to become.

[14 : 50] It is something that is always ongoing. We never come to the point where we've accomplished it all. We are always children.

Children of God. As we teach children to grow, they grow in strength and knowledge. And there comes a time when we maybe let them go.

We set them on their own way. We let go of them and they learn as they go on. But here as we think of this, we are always children of God. In the sense God doesn't let us go.

We are always clinging to him and holding on to him and walking with him. So the question is, who or what is teaching us?

Who or what are we seeking to be imitators of? Who is our great example that we look to? We want to seek to surround ourselves with those who will be good examples to us.

[15 : 57] As Paul is writing to the church here in Ephesus, he's writing to everyone together. Not just individuals, but them all together. And that's the way we are to receive this word as well.

All of us together as children of God. To be examples to one another. To be encouragers to one another. To have people around us who will encourage but also hold us to account as well.

And that includes myself. That includes every minister of the gospel. It's not just ministers telling a congregation, but ministers being held accountable too.

You may wonder what the life of a minister is like. At times you think, well, it can be quite a lonely experience. And it can be. Which is why it's important that every minister has people around him as well.

The encouragers, but also people that will hold him to account. So every minister in the free church is supposed to have a mentor. Someone who holds you to account.

[17 : 06] And other people you will have around you are friends who will encourage you. And why is that? It's for our growth and for our walk with the Lord.

And so it's important for every one of us to have people around us. Who do you go to when you need a bit of encouragement? Or who comes alongside you when you need a bit of a challenge in your life to hold you to account?

It's important that we have these people around us. But all the time being imitators of God. Walking closely with him.

And so we've got this first example. Be imitators of God. But then it leads into the second one. As beloved children and walk in love.

Walk in love. If you are to be loved by God and walk in love, do we have an example from him to follow?

[18 : 04] God asks us to love him. In Deuteronomy chapter 6 verse 5 it says, Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength.

It's a command. And then in the New Testament, the greatest command as Jesus is asked that question, What is the greatest commandment of all? Jesus' response is to repeat those words.

To love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength. And to love your neighbor as yourself. So we are called to love the Lord our God.

But we may ask ourselves, but do we see this love reciprocated? Well, if we don't, there's something wrong.

Because we see the love of God throughout the whole of Scripture. One of the most famous verses in Scripture, For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

[19 : 19] There you see the love of God to us. He gave his one and only Son. 1 John, it says, We love because he first loved us.

So the question isn't, when we think we love God, do we see that love reciprocated from God? The question is, does he see love reciprocated from us?

Is love is constant, is steadfast, as we've looked at recently? But are we walking in love of him? And again, there's this sense of this love developing.

And walk in love. So the more you go on, the more you see and realize the love of God to us. And the more you want to put away the old self.

The things that we read in chapter 4, the end of chapter 4, the former ways of life, the corrupt way of life, deceitful desires, all of these things.

[20 : 25] We want to put them away and be guided by and walking by the love of God. So is our Christian walk one that is walking in love?

So those who see us see the example of the love of Christ for us. So we don't question, does God love me?

We know he loves us. Because we see it throughout his word. He loves us to that extent that he gave his own son. So how important it is for us to walk in this way.

Not with slander and malice and gossip and all of these things. But to walk, being imitators of God as beloved children, walking in love.

So important. So important that Jesus in his teaching on the Sermon on the Mount says in Matthew 5, in the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.

[21 : 37] Does it make a difference how we live?

Will anybody look at my life and think, well, there is one of God's dearly loved children. Sometimes we feel no good is seen in us. But sometimes even after we're long gone, people may still speak about us in that way and remember the love of Christ that we knew.

Many years ago in China, the communist government, they had seen the impact that Hudson Taylor, the missionary, had had in that land.

And how so many had come to faith through his ministry and through his work. And they were all, the government was dead against this. And so they set about discrediting his name.

And they asked someone, an author, to do research into his life. And to write about his life in a way that would mar his name entirely.

[22 : 52] And this author was happy to do it. He was against the Christian faith. And so he set about looking into the life, researching the life of Hudson Taylor.

But what happened? The more he looked into Hudson Taylor's life, the more he was impressed by Hudson Taylor's character, his godly manner, the way he lived, and all the things he did so faithfully.

And the more he was going on, the more he was looking, the more convicted he was in his own heart. And he came to the point where he couldn't, in all good conscience, write what he was setting out to do.

In fact, eventually, with the risk of losing his own life, he put away all that he was meant to be doing. And he came to give his life and his heart to the Lord Jesus Christ.

Whether we realize it or not, our example leaves and makes an impression on others. We may not feel as godly as Hudson Taylor, but we all are the same Christ.

[24 : 08] We all live for him. So what kind of walk do we have today? Are we walking in love or giving ourselves over to walk in the ways that go against love?

What kind of example will we leave to others? That man who set out to discredit Hudson Taylor, saw the beauty of Christ in him, and came to follow that Christ.

Would it be wonderful that all of us would have that example of Christ, that light shining through us before others, that they may see our good works and give glory to our Father in heaven.

Walk in love. The third example and the final example we see here is the example of Christ. Walk in love as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

Christ gave himself up for us. What an example of walking in love. The perfect example for us.

[25 : 25] The one whose death we have remembered recently as a congregation. This do in remembrance of me, he said. And that is what we do. Not remembering ourselves and the example that we are to others, but always remembering Christ.

When you hear these words, walk in love as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, what impression does that make on you?

What does that do in your heart tonight? Is your heart hardened like the Gentiles who had alienated themselves from God because of ignorance in them and the hardness of their heart?

Or does it make your heart burn within? Does it melt your heart to think of the love of Christ for you that gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice for God?

When you think of his life as he gave it, and as we look on him who gave himself up for us, we so often, maybe in the past, have tried to condemn him.

[26 : 45] Crucify him, we said with the crowds. Take him away. I want nothing to do with this Christ until our conscience is awoken. Until by his grace, he opens our eyes to see how he loved us and gave himself up for us.

Just as a Roman centurion who looked on at the cross and marvelled at Christ crucified and said, surely this man is the son of God.

That is what he saw in Christ. He knew who he was. Surely this man was the son of God. He gave himself.

That shows it was his initiative. No man took his life from him. He gave it up. He went willingly to do what was required, what we could never do, and it satisfied God.

He gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. He did it for us. And so we are to keep our focus on him.

[27 : 54] It's so easy to lose our focus, and it can happen in so many areas of our life. We lose our focus, and there's often a cost. The golfer Arnold Palmer, very famous, very successful golfer, learned an important lesson about overconfidence.

Very early on in his life. He was on the final hole of the 1961 Masters. He was in the lead. It was his tournament.

He was about to win. He teed off, and his shot was perfect. He was confident going up the fairway, and he saw one of his friends to the side who beckoned him over, and he went over, and his friend put out his hand and shook his hand and said, congratulations.

Arnold Palmer says, in that very moment I took his hand, I realized I'd lost my focus. His next shot into the bunker.

His next shot across the green. Missed the putt. Lost the Masters. He said, he said, he said, he said, you don't forget a mistake like that. You learn.

[29 : 07] And he went on to have a very successful career. But doesn't it remind us, too, how easy it is for us to become overconfident, to lose our focus, to make mistakes, but we are to learn from these mistakes, and to refocus on walking as imitators of God, as beloved children, walking in love as Christ loved us.

we look to him. We are to come to him, and the example that he has put before us.

So may we do that. May we come and see these examples that we have, being imitators of God, something that may seem impossible, but that we are always to strive to be.

May we walk in the example of love, and may we follow and look to the example of Christ, who gave himself for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

May God bless these thoughts to us. We again come to sing to God's praise as we close. We're going to sing in the...