

Ephesians 4:30 – 5:20
August 12, 2018 – 12th SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST

Be Imitators of God

✦ **forgiving (4:30-32)**

✦ **loving (5:1-2)**

In the Name of God's Son, our "*fragrant offering and sacrifice to God*," dearly redeemed:

Sooner or later we all get there. Some feel that they live there. It's their "normal." You could call it, "the pits." Or maybe it's more like "rock bottom." How do you cope?

One woman wrote back after my encouragement: "I appreciate all of your insight greatly. I turn to spirituality often in moments of distress. I find it especially helpful to unplug and distance myself from some of the triggers that cause me stress and anxiety. I always appreciate hearing from readers about their unique experiences and the paths they have taken to recover and overcome hardship."

Can you hear her heart? *Works for you – great! Not for me?* Our Lord Jesus sometimes spent all night alone. But what was He doing? Praying to His heavenly Father, as Jesus taught us to pray, "Our Father in heaven...." And what did Jesus do then? He went back to His struggle, back to His mission, all the way to the cross for us. Now through His Apostle Paul we are told to **Be Imitators of God**.

✦ **forgiving (4:30-32)**

Wouldn't it be more natural to imitate Elijah? Rock bottom for him was downright dangerous. He had to get away. He won the showdown. No one could doubt the false god Baal was useless. Only the LORD God could answer Elijah's prayer to send fire from heaven...then rain to end the drought. How could the queen still want him dead? Elijah did not stay around to find out. Today's First Lesson (1 Kings 19:3-8) is his prayer in depression. He wants to die. What does God do? He feeds him twice with strength to travel forty days and nights to the mountain of God at Horeb. God comes to Elijah, but not in the wind or earthquake or fire, but in the gentle whisper of His Word. He informs Elijah that he is not alone; God has preserved 7,000 fellow believers. Then He commands Elijah to go back and finish his mission.

That was easy compared to our assignment in this Second Lesson. None of this comes naturally for us. We "*grieve the Holy Spirit*" whenever we take God's Word for granted. "Don't worry about church this week; there's always next week"? God's Spirit has a terminal point where He will stop striving with man. You can tell from the world wide flood of Noah's day. (Genesis 6:3) God's patience finally ran out. In Isaiah (63:10) we're told that the Holy Spirit becomes the enemy, fights against those who rebel and *grieve* Him. As Thomas Hastings wrote in his famous hymn: "*Delay not, delay not, The Spirit of Grace, Long grieved and resisted, may take His sad flight And leave thee in darkness to finish Thy race, To sink in the gloom of eternity's night.*" (TLH 278:3) One former feminist said she realized something on her birthday when she was buying herself a present. She had wandered into a Christian bookstore and was listening to Christian music. "I realized God had opened a window to my heart which could soon close. It was time to repent and be at peace with God." God never says, "Tomorrow...."

How can you "*get rid...of bitterness*" when people are so unappreciative of your hard work? "*Rage*" eats away inside. "*Anger*" bursts out of your wounded heart in "*quarreling and slander.*" Isn't that natural for all of us? The distance between hurt and "*anger*" is microscopic. "*Bitterness*" like weeds in a neglected parking lot, is too deep to tear out. It must die from the root.

God's command here is not just for us to cope; He wants us to rise above *anger* and *bitterness*. "*Instead, be kind and compassionate to one another.*" Kindness is *useful, beneficial, relieving each*

other's discomfort. Compassion wells up for others from deep down inside, like Jesus having compassion on crowds that followed Him to a remote place with no food. "Forgiving each other, just as God has forgiven us" means putting grace on others just as God has put grace on you in Christ. Lift up all angry thoughts and bitter resentment. Throw it all away. Put grace on it as you rise to Be Imitators of God.

How is that possible? It is not for us. This again is the work God does in us as Jesus taught us in last Sunday's sermon on the Bread of Life. Today's Gospel (John 6:41-51) continued that thought. Jesus told His fellow Jews, "**Stop grumbling among yourselves.**" He is the Messiah long foretold by their prophets. "**Amen, Amen, I tell you: The one who believes in me has eternal life.**" He gave His tender body into death as the "**living bread from heaven.**" Jesus is the "**fragrant offering and sacrifice to God**" that truly pleases Him. As Mark Twain put it, "Forgiveness is the fragrance the violet sheds on the heel that has crushed it." As God sheds the fragrance of His forgiveness on us by faith in Jesus, the dear Holy Spirit has "**sealed [you] for the day of redemption.**" At last all things will be made new in Christ.

Think how we imitated our fathers when we were little. See Daddy's shoes? Put them on! Try to walk in them. It's frustrating if your older brother took one. Walking around in oversized shoes needs the balance of both. **Be Imitators of God – forgiving** – that's one shoe. Now put on the other:

✦ loving (5:1-2)

Don't worry about getting yelled at. Your heavenly Father is delighted when you imitate Him. "**Be imitators of God as dearly loved children. And walk [about] in love....**" We have more than a fine example to follow. We have a Brother who helps us by the power of His strength and stamina. "**Walk in love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us....**" Jesus knows how deadly sin turns us in on ourselves in "**bitterness, rage, anger, quarreling and slander.**" These cancers destroy your soul and eat away at families and relationships. God wants to heal you inside so that you can be **loving** outside to others. Strength to be **loving** instead of vengeful comes from the great Good News that God loved us first in Christ. He went all the way to death on the cross to wash away all "**bitterness, rage, anger, quarreling and slander.**" Jesus willingly gave Himself as the "**fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.**" So **loving!**

We are surrounded by people powered by God's Bread of Life in Jesus to be **loving**. But you can only see them if you realize where we all start out. The Holy Spirit says through Paul, "**As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins....Like the rest, we were by nature objects of wrath. But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgression....For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.**" (Ephesians 2:1ff NIV84) Be surprised anytime someone says something kind or helps in a useful way. That's our **loving** God at work in us. God turns us outside to do the same for others – especially when they disappoint us, especially when they are thankless. God keeps **loving** us in Christ. It's **grace on grace**.

Maybe she's one of your favorites too. Her accident was in 1967; her movie came out about 1980. At age 17, she was diving in the shallow waters of the Chesapeake Bay and broke her neck. Quadriplegic, paralyzed from her shoulders down, she learned to paint holding the brush in her mouth. Over 50 books, many magazine articles on topics ranging from disability outreach to understanding the goodness of God and the problem of suffering – all turning outside. The mystery of suffering: *When God Weeps: Why Our Sufferings Matter to the Almighty.*¹ Joni Eareckson Tada does not want admiration. She knows her mission. "I want God to be glorified through me." **Be Imitators of God – forgiving, loving** in Christ.

Trouble outside – you be at peace. Research the Shunammite woman. (2 Kings 4:8-37) How could she keep saying, "**Everything is all right,**" when her only son was dead? Faith imitates God. Amen.

¹ <https://www.joniandfriends.org/jonis-corner/jonis-bio/>