

NATIONAL COMMUNITY CHURCH  
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Heaven on Earth\_ Ephesians 5 Hang a Street Light  
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The family had invited the pastor over for dinner that night. And of course, things got busy in the day work got hectic. The kids are at school and things are stressful getting dinner ready, but they got it on the table. The pastor shows up, they all sit down and the father says to the son, "Son, why don't you lead us in prayer?" "Dad, I don't know how to pray." "Wow. Just pray like your dad does." And so the son started in he says, "Oh, God, why do we have to have the pastor over for dinner?" Imitation. Imitation is sometimes complimentary but sometimes it's revelatory, isn't it?

A growing number of cognitive scientists and anthropologists contend that what makes humans so much more advanced than other living beings it's not just the innovation of humans. But researchers actually have another contention, specifically, and precisely around the idea that humans are able to cope with different climates, environments, situations and contexts by actually copying others, and specifically others that are respected. And so we learn imitation from the very first week that we're born right, the first week as a child, we begin to imitate others. And so it's really a matter, we'll go for the rest of our lives, and we learn through imitation. So it's really a matter of what we imitate.

When you think about imitation, we imitate all over the place in school, we regurgitate learned information, at home we imitate the action of our parents, in conversation we imitate the vernacular of our friends, in different social situations we imitate the images of culture. All of us do this. The apostle Paul knows this he knows this innate part of who we are. And then he speaks to this and he desires to bring intention and purpose specifically to this in our text today, which is Ephesians, chapter five, verses one through 14. And I'll start by reading verse one.

*"Therefore, the imitators of God."* It's the Greek word, *mimetes*. We get our English word from the root, we get the word *mimic* from this, and it means one who imitates or emulates. So it's not a single action. It's not a one and done. But imitator is a noun, so it's describing who the person is. So for example, if a child says a kind word to a sibling, but then goes over and snatches their toy, and whacks him on the head, well, they're probably imitating kindness from the or they're probably having an action of imitation of the parent, but they're not true imitators, right? If we say that we should treat others as Christ treats others and then we go out and we call someone an idiot for their political persuasion. Well, maybe we had a moment of imitation, but we're not truly imitators. Maybe at that job in that moment where we repay unkindness with kindness but then a couple hours later, we go to our coworker and we gossip about what the person just did previously. Maybe we were imitating for a moment, but are we really imitators of Christ.

We're called in verse one. It says we are imitators of God, it doesn't say, think about God. It doesn't say, reverence God or adore God. Those are all good things but in this situation, it says specifically it speaks towards action. "Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children."

James Baldwin said, "Children have never been good at listening to their elders, but they have never failed to imitate them." Can I get an amen from parents right there? I so desire to imitate my father. And I don't want to be him. I don't want to impersonate him. But I really want to those virtues that that came out of his life and were him I so desire for those virtues to be in my life as well? Do you know that, that when you begin to put your faith in Christ, you are made a child of God? And as a child of God as children, we desire to emulate our father, don't we? This is a natural calling of who we are in God and in Christ.

Let me ask you this. How would you describe your identity? Would you say you're good, you're bad, you're a winner, you're a loser, you fall short, you don't meet expectations? Would you say that you're not good enough? One pastor said it this way he said, "What you believe about yourself determines the life that you live." So if you believe that you're not good enough, well, you're gonna live your life like you're not good enough. To the extent or to the degree that you believe that you are beloved by God to that degree, well, then you live out the Father's word. Do you allow that other voice that you have given so much real estate in your head; do you allow that to be the dominant voice in your life? Or do you allow the Father's words to echo His truth, to echo in your spirit and in your soul?

Verse two, *"And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God."*

Notice Paul doesn't say, alright, feel love or fall in love. Right? No, he says, walk in love. There's action. There's daily action to this calling that we have in him. Last week, Pastor Mark eloquently lectured that we are not just the priesthood of believers, but we are the prophethood of believers, a company of prophet, a holy remnant, we are specifically called out to serve Him. And he said we must live in the kingdom of God in such a way that it provokes questions to which the gospel is the answer. We are a creative minority. Paul describes this walk as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. Sacrifice is those daily acts of love. It's counting the cost. And it's stepping in and sacrificing something that is ours for God, sacrificing something that is ours for others. It's about making decisions for others about our time, and our resources, and our energy and our sexual lives and our words and our careers and our reputations.

As a church it meant keeping Ebenzers Coffee House open when we knew that we weren't going to make profit. And instead we just said we want to serve our city in this way. It was re-designing or reconfiguring space so that we can serve over 200 meals for a number of different months for people who lived on the streets. It was that decision that Pastor Mark just referenced a few moments ago with the Dream Center we repurposed all of our programs and just decided to give groceries, to begin to serve

meals to the working poor to those who are down on their luck. Listen, 99% of nonprofits shut down we could have easily done that. But we made the decision because of such a gripping love in our hearts for the city. We realized with love, there are sacrificial acts that you make if you truly love the city. Show me your sacrificial acts, and I will show you who and what you truly love.

Verse three, *"But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints."*

Notice the moral appeal here isn't to live righteously so that you can become a saint, right? No, it's you are a saint, now live up to the standard of what I know you really are. Right? It's calling us up and it's calling us who we are. It's a relentless moral appeal in the New Testament that says this, just be who you are in Jesus.

Verse four, *"Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving. <sup>5</sup> For you may be sure of this, that everyone who is sexually immoral or impure, or who is covetous (that is, an idolater), has no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. <sup>6</sup> Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience."*

In church history, the pendulum of moral focus tends to swing doesn't it? Some churches focus in on specifically those sexual sins and then drive towards purity but maybe it's at the expense sometimes of greed or a comfort in covetousness. And then you have other churches over time that are hyper focused and calling out that those greed and the covetousness areas and maybe are driving towards justice or social equality and then but maybe there's a comfort over here with sexual sin or personal lives. But Paul here drives towards both doesn't he? He says no, we have this great calling and God; he calls in the scripture God's best for each one of us. Sin is when we step outside of God's best seeking inadequate satiation for an adequate need, financially, or sexually, or morally.

And then Paul looks beyond our actions, doesn't he? And he calls out what? He calls out idolatry. And idolatry goes from not just our actions; it goes from the inward places of our hearts. Idolatry is anything that we allow before God that we put before God, and he calls it out.

And in verse eight, he says, *"For at one time you were darkness."* Did you notice that? Not at one time you were in darkness at one time you, you were darkness. It's harsh, right? To know that we were actually darkness in the world that we were a part of the problem, that problem that we see and that we don't like so much, we have been part of that. We were darkness. Paul almost has this insight for a moment here into the true the depth of darkness that can enter our hearts and our souls at times.

Yehiel De-Nur was a survivor of the Auschwitz death camp. He was a Jewish man. And he had gone through and endured horrible situations and had seen horrible things in the concentration camp. And he

became one of the principal witnesses in the Nuremberg Trials of 1961. And the trials were for the war criminals people like Adolf Eichmann, one of the masterminds or architects of some of the Nazi thoughts. And so he's one of the principal witnesses and he gets up on the stand and as he's on the stand, he looks over and he sees Eichmann across the room. And what he does, he loses it. Like he drops down, physically falls to the floor, sobbing uncontrollably. For minutes, he couldn't pull it back together. I watched a video of it this week. And he's just down on the ground at the sight of Eichmann. And years later, it was Mike Wallace in an interview; he showed them this old footage of the emotional breakdown and the trial. And then he asked them the question that had never been asked, before. He asked this he said, "Why did you collapse and cry so violently? Was it fear? Was it terrible memories of the past? Was it your bitter hatred for Eichmann? De-Nur said, said "No, none of that at all. When I saw him, I saw myself. I realized that this man was just as ordinary man like me. And when I looked into his face, after all those years, I realized I am just as capable of this kind of crime." Wallace concluded the interview by saying this, he said, "Eichmann is in all of us." It's a horrifying story and it's a horrifying statement.

What De-Nur had discovered, was what most of us or was what is what most of us will discover if we take some time to pause, which most of us don't, and examine our own hearts. To understand that, given the right circumstances, given the right environment, given the right situation, we all have capacity for evil within us. And it's within our hearts and right next to love and care and beauty is this place of trouble in our hearts. Jeremiah 17:9 *"The heart is deceitful above all things, and beyond cure; who can understand it?"*

Paul is saying you have to recognize that there is darkness in your heart to understand what Christ did that he paid a price on the cross that he paid a price with his blood, that his sacrificial love and act for us is to give us a new heart. It's Ezekiel chapter 36. It says, <sup>26</sup> *"I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh."*

In Christ we are made new. And it's not just on the outside though this week a friend said, "Man, when I committed my life, when I had found faith in Christ, my friend said that he said, "Man, you're glowing." So something does happen on the outside sometimes, but it's really for the inner most part of who we are. God changes us he gives us a heart transplant. He makes us new.

Verse eight, *"For at one time you were darkness, but now (Come on, where are my people out there?) you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light<sup>9</sup> (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true),<sup>10</sup> and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord.<sup>11</sup> Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. (That's kind of interesting, isn't it? Come back to that.)<sup>12</sup> For it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret.<sup>13</sup> But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible, 14 for anything that becomes visible is light."*

We were darkness. That is our old identity from the past. Can I just double down on what I said earlier? What do you believe about yourself? Do you believe you're a failure? Do you believe you're not good enough? Or do you understand today what the scripture is saying that you were, you were, you were in the past, you were darkness. But something now has changed within you. Something is new within you, that by grace, that through grace, by faith, you are now a new creation in Christ Jesus, you have been made new, you are a child of God, you are forgiven. You are light in the Lord. You are a beautiful picture of who God is and of his image in this world. Know who you are today. It's a beautiful thing.

Now what about those of us who feel like me who still mess up, who still blow it sometimes, who still get off track? Well, there's good news in the scripture of what God thinks of us. Guess what? You're not canceled. All right. We're still in the game, when you're walking, as the scripture calls us to do to walk in the light when you're walking, you're on a path, right? And so we're on this path. Now, when we fall, when we get tripped up, it's not that we've lost our identity. It's that maybe we lost our way for just a minute, right and we trip up and we fall, and we're done. And maybe some of us here have lost our way today, because of frustration, or disappointment, or hurt, or being overcome or over stressed or fear whatever it is, we have lost our way today. But listen, what do you do in that situation? Well, you get back up, come on, you brush it off, you get yourself back and you start walking again. You're still on the path God is not done with you. He is still working in you and he is still working through you. Don't let the enemy tell you that you are a failure. Don't let him tell you that your family or that your family's past or your past; anything can stop you from walking in the light that is Christ. You got to put that voice in its place. And you got to allow God's voice to be the stronger voice in you. You are new creation in Christ.

If you're listening here today, and you're not following Christ and you almost, you sense some hardness in your own heart. And if you're honest, you're going after the cravings. Whatever you crave in life, that's what you're pursuing. You have no greater purpose in life. Or maybe you're here today and you just have, you don't have a perspective on what's happening. And you just or you understand that man I'm not where I need to be. I know there's something more for me and that's Christ speaking to you. And listen, here's what the scripture says. Jesus says to us, here's what he says. He says, "You know what, just turn around and come on." It says turn around. It's called repent in the Scripture, turn around, come and follow me. And we follow him, he makes us new. He gives us salvation. And he changes us from the inside out.

There's an old Sinach song called 'I Know Who I Am'. Anybody heard this song before? Goes like this...

We are a chosen generation  
Called forth to show His excellence  
All I require for life, God has given me  
And I know who I am

You ever heard this song before? You want me to stop right there. And it goes on to talk about I know who I am. And I know the character of God. I know who he has made me now and I know am new in Him.

We got to talk to ourselves sometimes, don't we? We have to declare to God and then God has us do that sometimes so we also hear with our own ears, who we are in him. What voices loudest? Some of us need to get around the right people don't we? We're hanging around with the wrong folks and we need to get into a small group, we need to get into a recovery group, we need to get into a group of faith.

But verse 11, says, "*Take no part and unfruitful works of darkness.*" We've been hanging around with the sons of disobedience haven't we? And we're called to get people around us to lift us up. And it says, but instead, expose them. So what does this mean to expose them? Well, tell you what it doesn't mean, it doesn't mean that you are now the Supreme Court on the streets, where you can just go around judging everybody else, right? It doesn't mean that you go into a bad situation and you make it worse, by bringing your drama into the situation and treating it like a morning talk show, you know, and bringing that mess.

No, as we look at it, what does it mean? I like to think of what my mother in-law loves so much, which is lighthouses. It means being a lighthouse. What does a lighthouse do? Shines out light over the darkness and that light then brings things into light to be seen. A lighthouse doesn't shoot off missiles. It doesn't shoot off fireworks, a light shines. And when a light shines, do you hear what I'm saying today, when you just shine that merely in and of itself by its own nature exposes darkness all around.

This past Wednesday on the Upper Zoom call David Grizzle, he called us to pray for those that had hurt us in our past, to pray for those who had brought darkness into our pathway. And then he did something - he proceeded to pray for the kid that made fun of him or the kids that made fun of him for being too heavy as a child and led him to get in fight after fight because he was this young, poor kid just trying to make it. And then he 50 years later, he's just starts praying for him on zoom. And then something happened then somebody else jumped in. And they began to pray for those that had made fun of them for their disability. They prayed for understanding. They prayed that God would pour a blessing on them. And then somebody else jumped in and started praying for the abandoners in their life, the people that had left them behind. Because when you forgive your hurt, you become somebody else's healing. Right? This is true. You know this in forgiveness, there is freedom. Have you ever forgiven somebody and then all of a sudden you become free in that process? In blessing, there is power. Do you know that? That's the next step. In forgiveness, there is freedom when I bless them; there actually comes power into us by doing that.

And then Ann Grizzle began to pray for those who were of unique political persuasions. And I thought this is a great moment maybe for us right now to lean in here. Can we do this and just talk about that as we face an election week in front of us? Just a couple of reminders and then a couple encouragements.

How do we imitate God in this specific season, in this moment in time? Well, first a couple of reminders.

One, I hope you're getting out to vote. Man, we have a civic duty, and a civic opportunity, I should say that the majority of people throughout human history have not had this opportunity or this chance.

Second, I hope you already voted because it's going to take a lot of time if you haven't, but still go do it right. And then second reminder is this that as you vote just to remind you, you're not voting for the Savior of the world. You're not voting for the savior of your soul either. Right? Last week, Pastor Mark referenced the Roman rule season of life. There's a common saying that Caesar is Lord. What they had done was they had intermix, they had interchange their politics and their religion. In Philippians chapter three, verse 20, I'm off notes. Where am I?

Philippians 3:20 - *"Their mind is set on earthly things. <sup>20</sup> But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ."*

Our Savior is not the president, it's not a party. Our Savior is our Lord Jesus Christ. Now, how can we be light this coming week? Three things, four things actually to consider.

First, let's be praying for whoever we didn't vote for both the candidate as well as voters, let's be praying for them. David Grizzle just gave a great example he modeled this for us. When you pray for those in opposition, God actually does something in your own heart and he casts light into the community, the world around us.

Number two, let's be humble in victory and let's be gracious in defeat. Nobody likes it when you Lord over them in victory, right? Let's be empathetic. And then secondly, if defeat comes, listen; let's not give into bitterness in those moments. What do the Scriptures say in James chapter four, verse six, it says *"God opposes the proud but he gives grace to the humble."*

Number three; let's commit to be unifiers in polarizing spaces. We have no idea what's going to happen this week. Here's what we do know, about half of our country, probably going to be upset, probably going to be disappointed, probably going to be going through a range of emotions. What an incredible time for us to step in, and minister. Wouldn't be powerful if we called up those people that we know are of different political persuasion, and we said, "Listen, hey, I know you're probably disappointed right now. I just wanted to call up and make sure you're doing okay and just tell you, I love you. I know you're hurting right now." What would that do?

And if you don't have those people to call, well, maybe that's a second thing for you to do to get a few other friends of diversity in your life. But a reminder is this that we have a civic duty, but as believers, we have a ministry duty. Right? God didn't say, all right, if the results go your way, make peace.

Scripture said Jesus said, "Blessed are the peacemakers." He was saying that to people who are hurting, to people who are in the middle of trial and tribulation. He called them to make peace and its work to make peace.

Let's decide and commit today as a church community that we're going to be lighthouses with this week, no matter the results, no matter the circumstances. Our faith is not circumstantial, am I right today? Right. It doesn't depend on our results. No, in fact, it's quite the opposite. We have faith not because of our circumstances, but in spite of our circumstances.

There's an old tale that back in revolutionary times, Benjamin Franklin tried to persuade the city of Philadelphia to put up streetlights all over the city. He felt like okay, this will help with tourism, and it will help actually stop crime to an extent. So he makes this big case, city doesn't do it. He's disappointed. So what does he do? He goes home and he buys an attractive lantern, goes on, he puts it up in his front yard. And then every night he goes out, and he lights that lantern. And people start to see this lantern every night and it's kind of nice. They like the warm glow that comes from that; so a few neighbors start to do it. Then a few more people go out and they buy lanterns and they light it. And next thing you know, the city has acknowledged the need for streetlights. And they progress forward in this action. Listen, when people aren't seeing the plan or path or solution like the way you think just a reminder today, you can't control them. You can only control your actions. You can only control how you seek the Father in heaven, and how you live that out. You've got to light what you want to come in sight. You may not be able to force people your way but you can hang a street light. You can light a lantern. And when you do, the warmth and the glow that comes from that it's attractive to the people around you and it will draw people into Christ that is in you.

What does it look like to light a lamp to hang a street lamp in the corner of your city this specific week to enlightened what takes place when we live as imitators of God. Paul ends this passage by quoting an ancient hymn. *"Therefore it says, "Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you."*

It's a hymn of what our lives should speak to in our world, awake, o sleeper. Wake up, God has called you to greater heights and higher purposes. And you've been running from me. I have put gifts in your soul that I desire to use yet you're sleeping today. Wake up oh sleeper arise. We've muted out the voice of God. We've stopped our conscience from hearing the whispering into our soul. And he keeps relentlessly pursuing us and he will keep coming after us but we stay asleep. He says, *"Awake, o sleeper arise from the dead."* He desires to bring healing to the hurting. He desires to bring sight to the blind. To those of us who feel stuck. He has made a way and he wants to bring us from darkness to light. He wants to bring us from death to life. He wants to put the shine back in your shimmy. He calls it out. "Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you."

In Jesus name we pray. Amen.