

Grace & Peace (March 18 - 22)

Lenten Devotions 2024

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Note: Scripture quotations, unless indicated, are taken from the English Standard Version.

Fifth Week of Lent—Monday, March 18

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 to God.

Ephesians 5:1-2

Like The Father

“Like father, like son.” “Like mother, like daughter.” You’ve probably heard these phrases. The idea is that children often resemble or behave like their parents. That can be a good thing (or not so good) depending on the traits, habits, or characteristics of the parent. If I’m honest, I can say there are some traits I hope my children have picked up from me and some I hope they haven’t. When Paul writes, “*Be imitators of God, as beloved children,*” he doesn’t have to worry about that!

If we want to imitate God, we first must know Him. We come to know Him through the Word (Holy Scripture) and through the Word made flesh, Jesus. Hebrews 1:1-2 explains: “*Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son.*” When one of His disciples asked to see the Father, Jesus replied, “*Whoever has seen me has seen the Father*” (John 14:9). The more we get to know Jesus, the better we know the Father and understand the One we desire to imitate.

Being an imitator of God means more than following His example, doing what He does or thinking the way He thinks (which, of course, we could never fully achieve anyway). Paul suggests an organic approach. “*Be imitators of God, he says, as beloved children.*” Children grow to become like their parents by spending time with them, by absorbing their values, by watching them live.

Lent is a good season to draw close to our Lord by immersing ourselves in Scripture, worship and prayer. Spending time with Him will help us grow to be more like our Father.

Gracious Father, Thank You for showing the world what You are like through Your Son. May Your grace help me keep growing in Jesus so that others can see the Father in me. Amen.

Tuesday, March 19

At one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true), and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord. Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them.

Ephesians 5:8-11

Children Of The Light

We followed the tour guide through a narrow opening and into the cave. As we walked along, the guide explained about the cave environment, the rock formations, the minerals, etc. When we were deep underground, he turned off all the lights that had been illuminating our path. It was dark, dark, dark! We dared not move an inch, because we had no idea where we would be going. Walking around in darkness simply isn't a good idea. When the guide lit one small candle, the tour group let out a collective sigh of relief.

In today's reading, Paul reminds believers not to wander around in darkness like they used to do. Instead, he wants them to walk as children of the light. He urges them to stay away from works of darkness, because God has a far better path for them—a path of light because they are children of Jesus, the Light of the world.

Jesus told His followers, *"Let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven"* (Matthew 5:16). Jesus' words about letting our light shine have a parallel in Paul's words about walking worthy, which we have been exploring in these devotions. The light we shine includes what we do (our actions) as well as how we do it (our attitudes); and what we say (sharing God's truth) as well as how we say it (speaking with love).

Last summer while on vacation we heard a pastor preach on Matthew 5:16. He gave a helpful perspective when he explained that Christians are to shine the light not at people (to point out their errors or sins) but for people so that they can come to see and understand the truth of the gospel for themselves.

Jesus, May Your light shine in us and through us, so that others may come to the knowledge of the truth. Amen.

Wednesday, March 20

Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is.

Ephesians 5:15-17

Walk Wisely

Walk worthy, Paul told us in chapter 4. Today he says, walk wisely. Scripture has a lot to say about wisdom in familiar verses such as: Proverbs 9:10, *“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight.”* And Proverbs 8:11, *“Wisdom is better than jewels, and all that you may desire cannot compare with her.”*

When Paul tells us to walk wisely, he also gives some suggestions: Be careful how you walk, make good use of your time, try to understand the will of the Lord. **Be careful how you walk** might mean be intentional. Give thought to your choices, your habits, and your interests. Are these things drawing you closer to Christ? Are they giving you the opportunity to let your light shine? If so, they would be a wise way to walk.

Make good use of your time could speak to priorities and where we focus our energy and time. Paul reminds us that the days are evil. Since that is a reality, how can we best invest ourselves in what matters most, what is of highest value in God’s kingdom? That would be a wise way to walk.

Understand the will of the Lord. This understanding is contrasted by Paul with foolishness, which amounts to wandering around in the darkness. But we have all the light we need in God’s Word. Studying Scripture, we understand God’s will and how to live it day by day. That is indeed a wise way to walk.

Walking wisely has been the call to God’s children in ages past, too. The writer of Psalm 90 understood this, and we will use his words as our prayer today:

Lord, You have been our dwelling place in all generations. From everlasting to everlasting, You are God. Teach us to number our days that we may gain a heart of wisdom. Satisfy us in the morning with Your steadfast love, that we may rejoice and be glad all our days. Let the favor of the Lord our God be upon us and establish the work of our hands. Amen.

Thursday, March 21

Be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, giving thanks always for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Ephesians 5:18b-20

Singing and Giving Thanks

“What do you do when you’re feeling down?” asked the youth group leader. One young man replied without hesitation, “I sing.”

That’s good advice, and it makes me think of Paul and Silas in prison in Philippi. They had been arrested, beaten, and put in chains and, yet “*about midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God*” (Acts 16:25a). When Paul encouraged the Ephesians believers to sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, perhaps he was recalling that night in the Philippi jail.

Christians through the ages have discovered the consolation that singing and giving thanks can bring, even in the midst of difficult times. As we approach Holy Week, we remember that on Maundy Thursday as Jesus lifted up the bread and the cup, He gave thanks. And then, after He had imparted new meaning to the Passover meal, they concluded by singing a hymn.

I wonder, did Jesus sing in the Garden of Gethsemane? Or while waiting to appear before Pilate? Or when hanging on the cross? Perhaps He sang silently in His heart. Perhaps He sang a song without words—a song of love for you and me.

Dear Jesus, Grant me a thankful heart that sings Your praises every day. Amen.

Friday, March 22

...submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.

Ephesians 5:21

Voluntarily Yield

Bible commentator Larry Richards explains that in the New Testament submission emphasizes voluntarily yielding to one another out of love. That definition aligns with our verse for today that says believers submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. In the verses that follow, Paul gives examples of submission in various relationships: husbands and wives, children and parents, slaves and masters. Paul's instructions, Larry Richards notes, are not to be viewed in terms of power or subservience but as providing different opportunities to serve one other.

That is the type of submission Christ demonstrated. He submitted to the Father's will when He became a human being, throughout His earthly ministry, and especially when He suffered and died for us. His submission was not because He was forced into it or under the Father's thumb. No indeed! Jesus explained: *"No one takes my life from me, but I lay it down of my own accord"* (John 10:18a). He voluntarily yielded in order to serve us. *"The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many"* (Matthew 20:28).

When you are faced with a choice to have your own way or to voluntarily yield your preference or your plan or your time in order to serve someone, remember the Jesus way of submitting out of love.

Dear Lord, Help me to freely love and serve others, just as You gave Your all for me. Amen.