Session 10

Walking in Love

Believers are to imitate Christ by demonstrating His love and character.

EPHESIANS 5:1-14

MEMORY VERSES: EPHESIANS 5:1-2

READ Ephesians 5:1-14, First Thoughts (p. 104), and Understand the Context (p. 104). Make notes about words and concepts that may require additional explanation during the Bible study session.

STUDY Ephesians 5:1-14, using Explore the Text on pages 105–109. As you study, watch for all the words that remind you of God’s forgiveness. Consider what the connection is between God’s forgiveness and our lifestyle.

PLAN the group time, using ideas under Lead Group Bible Study (pp. 110–111) and More Ideas (p. 112). Keep in mind the main idea that believers are to imitate Christ by demonstrating His love and character. Look for ways to point your group back to this truth throughout the group time. Consult QuickSource (available from LifeWay.com) for additional discussion questions.

GROW with other group leaders at the Groups Ministry blog (LifeWay.com/GroupMinistry).

GATHER the following items: Personal Study Guides. For Focus Attention (p. 110) you’ll need the following: Small slips of paper and a pen or pencil for each player; A timer; and A hat or basket. For More Ideas (p. 112), you’ll need: Oil; Three cups; Teaspoons; and Food coloring. Prepare to display the following Pack Item: PACK ITEM 3 (Poster: The City of Ephesus). Make copies of: PACK ITEM 10 (Handout: Ephesians and Colossians).
FIRST THOUGHTS

Gait is a word that only athletes or medical specialists use very often. It refers to the way a person walks—the movement of a person’s limbs while in motion. When there is an abnormality in a person’s gait, it can potentially cause health issues. Likewise, every person has a behavioral walk, the way they move through life. One’s manner of life is of the utmost importance. In the experience of a follower of Christ, it determines whether Christ’s love and character are demonstrated or obscured.

(In PSG, p. 91) What does a person’s walk reveal about him or her?

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

EPHESIANS 5:1-14

Worship in the Roman world was diverse and different from what was found in Israel. The Roman gods exhibited the human traits of passion, love, lust, jealousy, anger, and hate. This caused constant turmoil in the heavens, and this was often the way that the Romans would express the chaos of nature and life. In the town of Lystra, people mistook Barnabas for Zeus and Paul for Hermes, the son of Zeus and his messenger (Acts 14:12). Ephesus, like Lystra, was part of Asia Minor, and though it was bigger and more metropolitan, the gods predominated the religious scene.

The people of Ephesus identified with a goddess named Artemis, known in Roman culture as Diana. She was a Greek virgin goddess of the hunt and was depicted in statue as a many-breasted female. The temple to Artemis in Ephesus was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. It was also the hub of Ephesian economic life. Worship in the temple centered around the Artemision, a week-long festival in the spring dedicated to Artemis. This included erotic ceremonies of dancing and giving of extravagant offerings. The temple became so wealthy that it was the principal financial institution of Asia, receiving deposits and making loans like a bank.

As Paul continued his message to the Ephesians in chapter 5, he seemed to react against those who claimed a conversion to Christianity but continued in the immoral and greedy ways of pagan worship. He encouraged them to imitate God. By doing so, they would leave behind the impure practices of the temple in Ephesus, and they would not be given to greed as those in the financial institution that was in the temple of Artemis.
EXPLORE THE TEXT

IMITATE (EPH. 5:1-2)

VERSE 1
Paul summarized the previous section with an encouragement to be imitators of God. This imperative is in the present tense, which emphasizes continuous action. It is not a one-time arrival at being god-like but a pursuit of being like God that is continuous in daily life. The word for imitators is the derivative of the English word, mimic. It means to copy someone or to reproduce their actions.

Paul encouraged the Ephesians to look at God and imitate Him. Paul had already laid the foundation for this thought in Ephesians 1:5, where he said, "He predestined us to be adopted as sons through Jesus Christ for himself." A child often wants to copy the behavior of a good parent.

VERSE 2
The specific way Paul wanted the Ephesians to imitate God was to walk in love. Once again Paul used a present imperative here, stressing that this should be an ongoing pursuit of the believer. The Ephesians had already experienced the perfect example of love as Christ also loved them. This happened as Jesus gave himself for them. The ultimate demonstration of love was Jesus laying down His life for sinners on the cross.

Christ’s death was more than a good example; it made it possible for people to experience salvation.

Paul described Jesus’ death in two ways. First, it was sacrificial. This was the same term used in the Greek Old Testament to refer to the ritual of animal sacrifice. Christ’s death was more than a good example; it made it possible for people to experience salvation.

Second, Jesus’ death was a fragrant offering. This term often appeared in the Old Testament to describe the pleasant smell of the burnt offerings regularly sacrificed on the altar (Lev. 1:9,13,17; 2:2). This was the Old Testament description of God’s acceptance of the sacrifice as the aroma went before Him and pleased Him.

(In PSG, p. 94) Does walking in love define what it means to be an imitator of God? Explain.

BIBLICAL ILLUSTRATOR
For additional context, read “Paul’s Use of Light and Darkness,” an archived Biblical Illustrator article provided on the CD-ROM in the Fall 2019 Explore the Bible Leader Pack.
ISOLATE (EPH. 5:3-7)

VERSE 3
Paul encouraged his readers to remove themselves from any activity or group that displayed behavior contrary to God’s character. The first such activity was sexual immorality and any impurity. Far from the self-sacrifice modeled through the death of Christ, sexual immorality is the epitome of self-indulgence. The biblical ethic of sexual morality would have seemed excessively restrictive to those who were new Gentile converts. Their society accepted adulterous relationships, incest, temple prostitution, and homosexuality. All of these would have been covered in the things Paul prohibited in verse 3.

Paul also encouraged believers to avoid greed. Some commentators believe that this term is a reference to greed for sexual satisfaction, but it is possible that this term appeared with sexual immorality because it was also associated with the temple of Artemis. The culture in Ephesus was consumed with a desire for wealth. Paul cautioned Christians to be careful with the heart when it came to money. (See 1 Tim. 6:10.)

How would you describe the connection between sexual immorality and greed?

Far from the self-sacrifice modeled through the death of Christ, sexual immorality is the epitome of self-indulgence.

VERSE 4-5
Paul listed two types of speech that were inappropriate. First, he mentioned obscene and foolish talking. The word for obscene is often translated “filthy” and involved more than speaking obscenities, though it could certainly include that. It could refer to that which was shameful, disgraceful, and debased. By adding the word foolish, Paul was indicating that speech which was not worthy of speaking because it was moronic. When Christians engage in filthy and foolish talk, they disregard the command to imitate God (Eph. 5:1).

Paul also prohibited crude joking. This term literally meant “an easy turn of speech.” Though in Greek literature it often was used in a positive light, here it indicated an inhumane or degrading gesture. It was taking the easy way to get a laugh by something coarse or something better left unsaid.

In the place of vulgar and shameful speech patterns, Paul encouraged believers to be known as those who were giving thanks. If speech is an expression of what is in the heart (Luke 6:45), then it would be expected that thanksgiving should come from the heart of the Christian.
The apostle had a harsh warning for those who lived according to the ungodly ways he just mentioned. They would have no place in God’s kingdom. The first type of person Paul mentioned was the **sexually immoral**. Paul was not saying that people will lose their salvation if they commit an act of sexual immorality. The *sexual immoral*, *impure* and *greedy* were those who had not been changed from their old nature to a new person in Christ. Paul referred to each of these as an **idolater**. Whether they worshiped self, sex, or money, each of these negative categories included people who chose the worship of the created over the worship of the Creator.

Paul warned his readers that those who practiced these sinful lifestyles were revealing they had not experienced salvation. They had no **inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God**.

**VERSES 6-7**

People may argue that God is too kind to judge sin or send people to hell. However, Paul implored the Ephesians to **let no one deceive** them. He assured them that not only did God care how they lived, but He would be the ultimate judge of their lives. He encouraged them to not be led astray by **empty arguments**. He had a similar warning to the Colossians about these dangerous viewpoints (Col. 2:8).

Paul explained his warning by reminding his readers that **God’s wrath is coming**. The verb in Greek is a future tense, indicating a final, future date when God’s wrath completely falls upon those who disobey Him. Though God’s wrath is already being poured out on those who do not obey Him (Rom. 1:18-19), no person alive has experienced the full force of His wrath. Paul emphasized the reason for God’s wrath in the phrase, **because of these things**. What **things** did Paul mean? Certainly he was referring to the immoral, impure, and greedy actions mentioned in the previous verses. The judgment of God was coming to those who were **disobedient**. These were not Christians who had fallen into sin but those who had never experienced God’s forgiving grace in their lives.

**If we do not associate with lost people, how will we fulfill the Great Commission?**

Paul called upon the Ephesians to separate themselves from the lifestyles of unbelievers. He told them not to **become their partners**. This is not a prohibition against association with the lost, for if we do not associate with lost people, how will we fulfill the Great Commission? Rather, it is a commandment not to participate with them as **partners**. Rather than association, Paul was condemning participation. The degree of association with the lost is debatable with each situation, but the degree of participation with them in their evil deeds is without question. Christians have no place participating in sexual immorality, greed, or coarse speech.
VERSES 8-10

8 For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light—

9 for the fruit of the light consists of all goodness, righteousness, and truth—

10 testing what is pleasing to the Lord.

**Why is it important not to look for light from within but from Jesus?**

Paul argued that if a Christian had the light of Christ in him, he or she would exhibit the **fruit of the light**. This is a unique expression to Paul, but it is not the only time he mentioned *fruit* in the context of changed behavior. He spoke of the Spirit as producing the fruit—love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Gal. 5:22-23).

A life changed by Christ has three strong characteristics. First, Paul said that a Christian living in the light would produce **goodness**. Goodness is a quality of God Himself (Pss. 73:1; 118:1,29). In Paul’s earlier summary of salvation, he explained that salvation would produce good works in the life of a believer (Eph. 2:10). Second, Paul said the fruit of the light consists of **righteousness**. This was already produced in the believer as part of the new self that is created at salvation (Eph. 4:24), so that as believers walk in the light, they express the righteousness that God has already given them as a gift (Rom. 5:17). As believers continue to walk in the light, their behavior is transformed from unrighteousness to righteous conduct. Third, the fruit of the light also includes **truth**. Because believers experience the truth at salvation, that truth emanates like light from their lives. (See Eph. 4:15.)

How then are Christians to live out the changes that have been brought into their lives at conversion? Paul answered that question, encouraging the Ephesians to do a self-examination of their lives. **Testing** is a present participle, meaning a constant process of self-examination of the fruit of one’s life. The word used here had the dual idea of testing and approving, such as one might do with precious metals such as silver or gold (Prov. 17:3; 27:21). Paul told the Romans that when God renewed their minds, they would be able to test and approve what the Lord’s will was (Rom. 12:2).

The goal of testing our lives is not to find failure but to find success. We are to find a life that is **pleasing to the Lord**. But what pleases Him?
Certainly it pleases Him when those who are now in the light begin to walk in that light.

**VERSES 11-14**

Summarizing the previous verses, Paul encouraged Christians not to **participate in the fruitless works of darkness**. While light produces fruitful things such as goodness, righteousness, and truth (v. 9), darkness produces fruitless works. These are things that are unbeneficial, unproductive, and barren. Hiding from darkness does not drive it away. Only light will drive the darkness away.

Instead of participating in the works of darkness, the Christian should **expose** those works. This is the result of light penetrating darkness. When light arrives it inherently exposes the darkness. The word for *expose* can also be translated as “rebuke” or “convict,” and that is the purpose of exposing the deeds of darkness. The Christian must not participate in the darkness but rather expose it to bring conviction and correction in the life of the one who has embraced those deeds of darkness.

This verse seems odd in the face of a society filled with talk shows that expose every deed of darkness and news magazines that glory in the most sordid personal details of a celebrity’s life. Paparazzi follow the famous to find the latest bit of smut that can increase viewership, increase readership, or serve as click bait on the computer. Reiterating the message of Ephesians 5:3, Paul reminded his readers that it is **shameful** to speak of such deeds of darkness. This was a term that Jewish writers used as the opposite of virtue.

Though Paul encouraged Christians not to speak of shameful things, this does not mean God looks the other way and does not see them. When evil deeds are **exposed by the light**, then all things become **visible**. Just talking about sin will not bring about the intended result. The darkness of sin must be exposed by the light of the gospel. The only way to expose the darkness is to let the light shine.

To emphasize his discussion about Christians’ illuminating their darkened world, Paul included in verse 14 a quotation from several passages put together (Isa. 9:2; 26:19; 40:1; 51:17; 52:1; 60:1). It is possible that this was an early baptismal hymn that emphasized the resurrection qualities of new birth in Christ. The emphasis of the hymn was that they had risen from their dead way of life (Eph. 2:1) to new life in Christ, where He began to **shine** on them. Believers humbly expose sin in the world through their actions and deeds, but only Christ has the power to wake them from the dead.

What happens when people attempt to expose sin apart from the convicting power of Christ?
LEAD GROUP BIBLE STUDY

FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS)

PLAY: As the group arrives, hand each person a slip of paper and ask them to write the name of one celebrity. Keep the names hidden, and fold up their slips of paper. Then place all of them in a hat or bag. Once most have gathered, lead the group to play Celebrity Charades. Create teams. In this game, you’ll try to get your team to guess which celebrity you are by imitating them. One at a time, invite a representative from each team to draw a slip of paper. Give them thirty seconds to imitate the celebrity on the list, alternating between each team. The team who gets the most correct answers is the winner.

ASK: It’s often said that imitation is the highest form of flattery. Why is this true, and what are some of the characteristics in other people that you most often try to imitate?

TRANSITION: While it can be tempting to imitate famous people who model various characteristics we respect—such as generosity, compassion, hospitality, or leadership—there’s only One who is worth imitating, and that person is Jesus Christ. In the text we’ll look at today, Paul taught that believers are to imitate Christ by demonstrating His love and character.

SAY: Display Pack Item 3 (Poster: The City of Ephesus) and using the information in Understand the Context (PSG, p. 92), set this passage in the context of the greater Letter to the Ephesians. Briefly explain the importance of redemption and grace as the motivation for why we’re to walk in a worthy manner as imitators of Jesus Christ.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

READ: Direct a volunteer to read Ephesians 5:1-2, while the group listens for the one characteristic that’s essential for anyone who strives to imitate God.

DISCUSS: Lead a discussion of what it looks like to imitate God. Make a list on the board of different character traits people mention, supporting each one with a biblical text if possible.

SAY: The apostle Paul challenged believers to be imitators of God. This is not a command to be taken lightly; rather, it’s to be the lifelong pursuit of those who walk in the new life described in Ephesians 4. It’s how those who are His “dearly loved children” (v. 1) respond to Him.

ASK: How do we remind ourselves each day that we are “dearly loved children” of God? Why must we first understand who we are in Christ before we can strive to be like Him?

EXPLAIN: Emphasize the importance of knowing who we are in Christ in order to obey everything else Paul commands. Use the information under Verse 1 (PSG, p. 93) for support.

ASK: As we read verses 1-2, we discovered the most important trait God calls us to model after Him—love. What characterizes the love of God? From the PSG (p. 94): Does walking in love define what it means to be an imitator of God? Explain.

SUMMARIZE: Throughout the New Testament, both from the example of Jesus and the writings of others, it’s evident that love is a defining character trait of God. Therefore, it’s to be a defining trait of His people. As Jesus modeled for us, this love is sacrificial in nature. We love others and give our lives for them because that’s what Jesus has done for us.
TRANSITION: Having established the foundation for a life that imitates God, Paul next reminded His readers that children of God are to separate themselves from ungodly behavior.

READ: As you read aloud Ephesians 5:3-7, pause after each behavior or trait mentioned that is to be avoided by God’s people and write it on the board.

ASK: What conclusions about God’s people can we draw from this list? What are the dangers of these behaviors, and why does God not tolerate these behaviors or traits in the lives of His people? Create teams of two or three people to discuss these questions. Call on one representative from each team to summarize their thoughts.

SAY: This list isn’t exhaustive, rather it highlights broad categories of behavior that stand in direct contrast to the love, holiness, and righteousness God expects His people to display.

GUIDE: Distribute copies of Pack Item 10 (Handout: Ephesians and Colossians) and read Colossians 3:12-17 to remind the group of the positive traits Christians are to clothe themselves with instead. Use the handout to note other characteristics that believers should display to the world.

ASK: We will either follow Jesus’ example or mimic the behavior of those who don’t follow Him. How can partnerships (business, social, recreational) impact a person’s spiritual life? (PSG, p. 96)

TRANSITION: Paul challenged his readers to live as light in a dark world, producing acts that are pleasing to God and that expose ungodly actions.

READ: Direct a volunteer to read Ephesians 5:8-14. Encourage the group to underline words and phrases that describe walking in the light.

DISCUSS: Light is a common image used throughout the New Testament to describe both the effect of Christ in a person’s life and the effect of the believer in the world. Call on pe-enlisted volunteers to read Matthew 5:14-16; John 8:12; John 12:35; and Colossians 1:9-14. Ask: What additional insight do these verses give into what it means to walk in the light of Christ?

ASK: How do believers serve as light in the world? What is the relationship between walking in love (v. 2) and walking as children of light (v. 8)? (PSG, p. 97)

HIGHLIGHT: Read aloud the final paragraph beginning “Christ calls us to live as light in a dark world ...” on page 98 of the PSG.

MEMORIZE: Encourage the group to memorize Ephesians 5:1-2. Remind them that being an imitator of God means we take great care to isolate ourselves from behaviors that contradict who we are in Him, and we illuminate His love and truth in a dark world.

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT)

REVIEW: Read the summary statements under In My Context (PSG, p. 99). Spend the rest of your time together discussing the second question (PSG, p. 99): In what ways can your small group spur one another toward living a godly lifestyle in the midst of a fallen world?

PRAY: Close in prayer, asking God to help you be people who imitate Christ by demonstrating His love and character to a watching world.
PRACTICE

• Reach out to group members who were not present on Sunday. Invite them to share any prayer requests and ministry concerns. Give a summary of the session and encourage them to study the passage on their own, using their PSG.

• Personally reflect on the third question set under In My Context (PSG, p. 99): Has the darkness of this world lulled you into a spiritual slumber from which you need to awaken? Ask God to examine your life and to help you be more aware of opportunities to be light. Also email this question set to your entire group and encourage them to reflect on it this week.

MORE IDEAS

FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS)

To replace the Focus Attention activity, read the paragraph on page 91 of the PSG. Lead the group to create a list of different kinds of walks (examples: slow, fast, confident, defeated, etc.). Ask: What does a person’s walk reveal about him or her?

EXPLORE THE TEXT

• To supplement the Ephesians 5:1-2 discussion, ask a pre-enlisted volunteer to share a brief example of a time when someone loved them in a sacrificial and selfless manner that helped them see the love of Jesus.

• To add a visual to your discussion of Ephesians 5:3-7, do the following activity: Bring a jar of oil (canola, vegetable, sunflower, etc.), and place it on a table in front of the group. Remove the lid. Fill three plastic cups partially full of water, and add a different color of food coloring to each cup. Slowly drip a teaspoonful of the colored waters into the jar of oil. As the jar fills with water bubbles, discuss what it’s like to live set apart from the world. Ask: What do you find most challenging about being called to this new life?

• For further discussion of Ephesians 5:3-7, ask: In which area of your life (business, social, recreational) is it hardest for you to imitate Christ and isolate yourself from the world? Share with the person sitting next to you.

• To add to your discussion of Ephesians 5:8-14 (and 5:1-14 as a whole), complete the Bible Skill activity found on page 94 of the PSG.

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT)

Brainstorm together the first question set (PSG, p. 99): List actions of love that you could show to a neighbor—actions that echo those Jesus Himself might take. What one action from your list will you take this week? Guide the group to leave today with an actionable step you will take together. As a follow-up to the last session, give another volunteer the opportunity to share the story of his or her life before and after Christ.

SUGGESTED MUSIC IDEA

To close your group time, play the song “In the Light,” by dc Talk. Encourage group members to listen for the tension of walking in the light that the song captures so well.