

Everyone Lives to Imitate

Ephesians 5:1-2:

¹Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children. ²And walk in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

Introduction

I want to begin today with three statements. They are a framework that will help us unpack these two verses, and also much of the Bible too. They are three key statements that - if you can understand and grasp them - will begin to help you unpack much of what the Bible says about God's glory and our joy, how God being praised in our lives is synonymous with our joy in Him, and how the pursuit of God's glory in our lives is synonymous with us being brought to satisfaction in Him.

So here are the three key statements that form that framework:

1. Everyone has a desire to imitate greatness

Firstly, everyone has a desire to imitate greatness. We love knowing and being in the presence of greatness.

For example, the young man in high school who has posters of his basketball hero on his wall. Every time he gets on the basketball court, he thinks he's LeBron James. Or the young woman in high school who travels everywhere with her iPod, singing along to Justin Bieber, her hero and role model. *Everyone has a desire to imitate greatness.*

For those of you into cooking, it's the reason you buy certain cookbooks by certain authors (E.g. Ferran Adrià or Heston Blumenthal); step by step you follow their recipes to reproduce their creations. Or for those of you into guitar, it's the reason why you study and work out how to play certain pieces; step by step you learn to play those guitar riffs so that you can reproduce the creation of your guitar god (E.g. Carlos Santana). Everyone has a desire to imitate greatness.

We don't just have a desire to imitate greatness in our lives, we only imitate that which we consider supremely great, and we pursue only that which we consider supremely great.

You're not going to consider me your basketball hero, you're not going to sing along with me on your iPod, you're not going to pay for a cookbook I write, and you're not going to want to play guitar like me. **So in life we always look for, and we always imitate, what we consider supremely great.**

2. The closer we get to imitating greatness, the greater praise the one we imitate receives

Secondly, the closer we get to imitating greatness, the greater praise the one we imitate receives. The closer we get to becoming more like the one we consider supremely great, the greater praise they receive, and the greater glory they get. The closer you get to playing basketball like LeBron James, to being with or singing like Justin Bieber, to cooking like Ferran Adrià, and to playing guitar like Carlos Santana, the greater praise they get, and the greater glory they get.

Imitation is the best form of praise. The better you are at imitating that which you consider supremely great in your life, the greater the glory they get.

If you think about it, there's a difference between listening to Pachelbel's 'Canon in D' played by a 5-year-old who's learning piano, and hearing it played by the London Philharmonic Orchestra. The 5-year-old who's learning piano sounds okay when he plays it, but Pachelbel's music is magnified even more when it's played by the London Philharmonic. The greatness of his music is glorified even more.

The closer you get to imitating that which you consider supremely great, the greater praise they receive because we sound and look more like them. And the closer we get to imitating them, the greater we amplify them, their worth, greatness, glory, and supremacy. Imitation is the best form of praise; the highest form of praise.

3. The closer we get to imitating greatness, the greater our joy because we are becoming more like the one we are imitating

Thirdly, the closer we get to imitating greatness, the greater our joy because we are becoming more like the one we are imitating. The closer you are to becoming that which you consider supremely great in your life, the greater your joy, happiness, and satisfaction in their greatness will be, which is why no one looks to cook up recipes from a chef they consider mediocre; there's no joy or satisfaction in that.

The only reason why you would seek to recreate a dish by a chef you consider great is because it gives you joy and satisfaction. **The only reason why we seek to imitate greatness in our lives is because it brings us joy and happiness; it gives us satisfaction in their greatness.**

No one tries to learn and reproduce a guitar riff by their guitar hero to be unhappy. No one listens and sings along to their rock star Justin Bieber to be unhappy (maybe some of us do). No one tries to play basketball like LeBron James to be unhappy. And no one strives to create dishes by their master chef Ferran Adrià to be unhappy.

In fact, the closer we get to becoming, and reproducing, in our lives what we consider supremely great, the greater our joy. It's the reason why, **in everything we do, we strive constantly to become that which we consider supremely great.** It's the reason why Greg, who loves cooking, will meticulously follow a master chef's soufflé recipe, and do it over and over again until he is able to reproduce it perfectly. The closer he gets to it, the greater his satisfaction. It's the reason why Roy will sit in his room and listen to a guitar riff over and over and over again, and playing it over and over again until he gets it right, to imitate and reproduce it. And the closer he gets to it, the greater his joy, happiness, and satisfaction because he's playing like his guitar hero.

Even when it requires time, effort, suffering, and hardship, we do it because doing what it takes to imitate and become what we consider great brings us joy and satisfaction.

These are three key statements that reflect life; that's just how life works:

- 1) Everyone has a desire to imitate greatness,
- 2) The closer we get to imitating greatness; the greater praise the one we imitate receives, and
- 3) The closer we get to imitating greatness, the greater our joy because we are becoming more like the one we are imitating. The closer we are to that which we consider supremely great in our lives, the greater praise they receive, and the greater our joy and satisfaction in them.

A Call to Imitate God as His Children v.1

So it's no surprise that, as God's people, we read these words in **Ephesians 5:1: *¹Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children.***

It's important to follow the logic of the passage so far:

There are Two Realities in God's Economy (Ruled By the Old Self or Ruled by Jesus)

Remember what Paul's been saying: there are two realities in God's economy. Men and women live under one of two realities (vv.18-19, vv.20-24, or Eph.2:1-6: ruled by the old self, hardened heart, darkened mind, ignorant, callous, alive to your self-centered desires in life, a slave to the world and flesh, and ruled by the devil, versus ruled by Jesus, made alive in Jesus, raised to new life in Jesus, seated with Jesus on a throne, and with Jesus now dwelling in your heart through faith.)

So you get to ch.5 and Paul says, ***therefore if you want to know the joy of life under the new reality***, if you want to know the freedom of the new life ruled by Jesus, if you want to know the satisfaction of living like a son or daughter who has been freed from the old way of life, ***it begins by pursuing what should now be of greatest worth, value, and greatness for the Christian: God Himself.***

Under the old reality (before we were saved), we didn't see His value, we didn't consider Him worthy, and we didn't hold Him up as supremely great. In fact, Romans 1:23 tells us that under the old reality, and in our blindness, we took the greatness that was God's and ascribed it and gave it to lesser things in our lives. **We exchanged the glory of God and gave glory instead to created things.**

So under the new reality (now that your eyes have been opened), what happens? **You now begin to see rightly.** *You were previously dead and blind, and are now alive to Him and seeing.* You begin to see God's infinite worth, God's incredible value, and God's supreme greatness above all things; you begin to see that there is no higher treasure in the universe worth having. The gospel saves and brings you to supreme greatness in the God who is above everything in power, majesty, greatness, wisdom, justice, love, mercy, compassion, kindness, security, and hope; infinitely supreme in everything (1 Pet.3:18 says the goal of the gospel is God: He is the treasure).

So for Christians, for us believers, if there's anything or anyone in the universe that we should consider supremely great in our lives, if there's anything or anyone above all in what we should pursue, and if there's anyone we should imitate, be like, and reproduce in our lives, **it would be God himself.** There is nothing higher or greater.

So in v.1: now that we've been saved, *we're called to imitate ... God, as His beloved children*, as His sons and daughters. **Where I previously considered everything else great and worthy of my praise and worship in life, I now see that supreme greatness and worth in God.**

Notice another reason why we're to imitate God: we're now His children, and He's our Father. **The gospel doesn't just deal with your sin, but brings you into a family where God is now your Father.** Another way of describing the new reality under the gospel is in Ephesians 1:5: in the gospel, you're adopted as sons or daughters through Jesus; previously you were orphans, and now you're a son or daughter in God's family. **So as His children, we're to imitate the one who is now our Father.**

Like Father Like Son in the First century

Paul's language of 'imitating your Father' was something familiar in the Greek-speaking world in the first century. Back then, families worked very differently from families today; children didn't get to choose what they wanted to do when they grew up. Today, you can choose what you want to study, and what career you want to pursue). But **in the first century, children followed in their father's footsteps.**

If your dad was a carpenter, you walked in his footsteps; you became a carpenter. And the way it worked was that he would teach you his profession as you grew up, you would watch him in the workshop, he would show you what to do, and you would learn off him. You would imitate him and learn the family business; you would imitate him, and work with him in running the family business. (E.g. metal worker, baker, fisherman, and etc.)

Can you see what Paul's saying about believers? **If God is your Father, then the most normal thing you would pursue in the Christian life is learning how to imitate Him.** That's the new normality: to learn from Him, become more like Him, trade in His business, and do His work.

Who I Imitate Reveals My Father

In fact, who I imitate tells me who my Father really is. It's the reason why Jesus puts it this way in **John 8:44** (when speaking to the religious leaders who oppose Him, sought to kill Him, plotted against Him, refusing to accept Jesus' work, and denying His word):

You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and has nothing to do with the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies.

Their desires, works, and thinking are a reflection of their Father: the devil. *That's the point Jesus makes: like Father like Son. Who you imitate, and who you pattern your life after, reflects who your Father really is.*

1 John 3:10: *By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother*

Who you are imitating reflects who your Father is. **What you trade in, and the work you do, reflects who your Father is.** *The children of God trade in righteousness, like their Father; the children of God trade in love, like their Father. But the children of the devil trade in unrighteousness and hate, just like their Father.*

Let me ask you this question: who's your Father? Who's your daddy? And the answer is found in who you are imitating in life, who you are following in life, and whose business and work is supremely great in your life. **There are only two realities in God's economy: a son or daughter of God, or a son or daughter of the devil.**

So as God's children, and if God is my Father, I am to imitate Him, learn from Him, become more like Him, follow after Him, learn His business, and do His work. *Do you know the Father? Do you know His business? Do you know His work? Do you know what to imitate?*

If God is my Father and I am to imitate Him, what's His business? What's His profession? What marks His work? **God, your Father, trades in grace; He works in the grace industry.** At the heart of the gospel is the grace of God in saving, freeing, redeeming, and forgiving undeserving sinners. At the heart of the Cross is God's work of grace in His Son, who was crushed in my place for my sin, who faced the just wrath and judgment of God for my sin, and who died in my place for my sin. He died for the undeserving; that's grace.

Ephesians 2:4-9:

⁴But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, ⁵even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ— by grace you have been saved— ⁶and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, ⁷so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. ⁸For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, ⁹not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

To imitate the Father is to trade in grace: to become a son or daughter overflowing with His grace, to speak His grace, walk in His grace, offer His grace, and do His work of bringing His grace to others. This is why everything that chapter 4:24 calls us to pursue in our lives is a reflection of grace.

Instead of working for myself, I now work to meet the needs of others (*just like the Father, who selflessly worked to meet my greatest need: forgiveness*). Instead of being forever angry with people who cross me, I now get angry about the right things: sin (*just like the Father who, in His grace, deals with my sin by pouring out His anger on His Son instead of me; that's grace*).

Instead of speaking lies and selfish words, I now work to speak to build others up (*just like the Father who, in my sinfulness, spoke words of grace in my life*). Instead of being bitter and unforgiving, I now work to be kind, compassionate, and forgiving (*just like the Father who, in my rebellion, showed me kindness, compassion, and forgiveness*).

The Father trades in grace, and those who are His children follow in His footsteps; they imitate Him in their lives, doing and carrying out His business. **That is the primary business of the Christian; it is your primary vocation as a believer, and your real profession.**

This is why, if the new normality is not present in our lives, if I am not marked by a life transformed by grace, if I am not going about like my Father, if I am not going about my Father's business, and if the Father's work is not my desire, **then it probably means that God is not our Father.**

Either God is your Father, or the devil is your Father. The marker of who you belong to, and who your daddy is, is seen in the likeness you bear, or the fruit you bear: like Father, like son. It is just like the parable of the soils that Jesus tells in Matthew 13. All soil looks the same in this community, but the kind of soil you are is seen in the fruit you bear; *where there is no fruit, there is no salvation, and there should be no assurance.*

The whole point of Jesus' warning in Matthew 7 is that **the kind of fruit a tree bears reveals the nature of the tree: a good tree bears good fruit, and a bad tree bears bad fruit.**

In James 2, we're reminded that faith without works is dead. You have good theology, but so does the devil; you have Bible knowledge, but so does the devil. **It's the fruit of the gospel in your life that tells you whether you're saved,** and it's the outworking of saving grace in your life and works that reveals whether God is your Father, whether or not you're His, whether you've experienced His grace, and whether or not your eyes have been captured by His grace.

That is why, if the new normality is not present in our lives, if I am not marked by a life transformed by grace, if my studies and work and family are not led by God's grace, if I have no interest in hearing Him speak to me through the Bible, if I am not going about like my Father, if I am not growing in grace in my relationships, if I am apathetic about sin in my life, if obedience is unimportant in my life, if I am not growing in godliness, if I am not going about my Father's business, if mission and evangelism is not a passion in my life, or if the Father's business is not shaping my time and money and priorities in life, **then it probably means that God is not our Father; the devil is.**

Because here is the flip side: **you read in 1 John 3:8** that *he who keeps on sinning is of the devil because their Father the devil has been sinning from the very beginning.* His pattern of sin, as you go on to read in 1 John 3:10, is that he doesn't care for godliness, and he doesn't care for people; unrighteousness is his nature, and hate is his nature. **The devil's sons and daughters trade in unrighteousness and hate; they have no desire for righteousness or godliness, they have no interest in obedience, they live in habitual sin, and they have no love for people.**

Or you read John 8:44-47, and there we're told that the devil was a murderer from the beginning; he has nothing to do with truth because he is devoid of truth, he is a liar, and is totally opposed to Jesus. And his sons and daughters trade in the same thing. **It's in their nature; they hate, have no interest in the truth, and Jesus means little to them.**

It's the reason why Paul goes on to say in **Ephesians 5:7-9:**

⁷Therefore do not become partners with them (v.6, the sons of disobedience, sons of the devil); ⁸for at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light ⁹(for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true).

If you are children of the God who is light, walk in the light of His image and His likeness; be like Him who is light: doing His work, carrying out His business, and bearing the fruit of light in everything good, right, and true about God. Who's your father? Who are you imitating in life? Who are you walking after? Whose business consumes you?

Your desire to be like God your Father depends on how much you see and value Him as your treasure, how much worth you ascribe to His work of grace, how much you esteem Him as worthy of imitation, **and whether you consider Him supremely great: *whether the light is attractive to you.***

The same holds true with earthly fathers. No one wants a tyrannical, abusive, lazy, harsh, bitter, and malicious father who is never there for you, never gives you love, never protects you, never affirms you, and never has time for you. No one wants to follow them, no one holds them in esteem or worth, and no one wants to be like them.

God, your Father, is everything a Father should be and more. He cannot love you any more than bringing you to Himself because there is nothing greater He can give you. Psalm 16 reminds us that the beauty of our inheritance is God Himself. **Psalm 16:11** says: *you make known to me the path of life.* Where is this found? It is found as you continue reading. It's found in the presence of the Father: ***for in His presence is fullness of joy, at His right hand is where I am, and where I will be as His son or daughter are pleasures forevermore.***

Like anything in life, we only imitate, desire, and pursue what we consider supremely great. *So the question you have to ask yourself is whether He is supremely great in your life.* **Until you see the greatness of God your Father, you will not imitate Him or desire to be like Him.**

Psalm 68:5 says He is the Father of the fatherless, and protector of widows. Psalm 103:13 says He is the Father who shows compassion to His children. Compare this to Luke 15, which says He is the father who is filled with compassion.

And like anything in life, you never discover greatness and beauty until you spend time immersed in it. For example, for couples in relationship, it's only as you spend time together, listening to each other, talking on the phone, working together, and studying each other that you discover how great and awesome the other person is, and as that happens they become your treasure.

It's the same in the Christian life. **You only discover the greatness and beauty of the Father as you spend time with Him, become immersed in His word, listening to Him, and studying Him.** Too many of us live a dumbed down Christian life, with our minds and intellect in the clouds. Look at what Paul has said in Eph.4:23. *Our minds need constant and continual renewal.* Compare this to Romans 12:2, where we're told that transformation comes by the renewing of our minds. **You're either a dumb or lazy Christian if you want to bypass the mind and intellect that God gave you to know Him more.**

Phil Tai is reading a book by A.W.Tozer where he reads each chapter from *The Pursuit Of God* meditating and thinking through each chapter each week. Or others here are working through *Knowledge of the Holy* by A.W. Tozer. You can read each chapter on different aspects of God's

glory and greatness: his justice, love, mercy, grace, holiness, sovereignty, power, transcendence, wisdom, eternity, self-sufficiency, self-existence, immutability, and omniscience of God.

Some of the men in church are listening to solid lectures on theology on their way to work, and some of the women in church are meeting up to work through a good Christian book that is helping them grow (*Let the Nations Be Glad* by John Piper, *Respectable Sins* by Jerry Bridges, and *Desiring God* by John Piper). They're doing it because they want their minds to be renewed; they want to see the greatness and worth of the Father.

What are you doing to renew your mind? **Until you do that** (if you're struggling to see the supremacy of God above all things, and if you're struggling to see His greatness above all things) **everything else will assume the place of supremacy and greatness in your life** because that's what you're filling your mind with.

The first half of **Romans 12:2** says: *don't be conformed by this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds*. This means that **if my mind is not being renewed by the Bible, then it's the world that's filling my mind, and telling me where greatness is to be found and followed.**

As you do that you will discover, like the Old Testament people of God (Israel, His children), that **everything you will ever need can be found in God, the Father**: your security, strength, refuge, defender, protector, hope, rescuer, warrior, power, wisdom, godliness, and righteousness. *He is a Father whose glory, as Isaiah 6 reminds us, is His holiness.*

He is the God who is supreme and above all in everything, and who is above everything you can ever experience and know in power, majesty, greatness, wisdom, justice, love, mercy, compassion, kindness, security, and hope. He is infinitely supreme in everything; for there is no one like Him. He is holy. **Is He supremely great in your life? Does He hold the place of pre-eminence above all things?**

Conclusion

It's true to say that, in life, we live to imitate greatness, and we live to become that which we supremely treasure in life. Some of us have our heroes that we seek to become, some have celebrities that they dress after, some have images of a picture perfect family that they aspire to, and some have ideals in terms of career and work that they glorify, seek to become, and live for and pursue.

Coming back to that framework at the start:

- 1) **We imitate only that which we consider supremely great**
– Whether it's a person, or an ideal or image.

- 2) **And the closer we get to becoming more like that person, the closer we get to that ideal in our lives, the greater that person or ideal is magnified for others to see**
– If supreme greatness for you is defined by the image of a picture perfect family, when people see it in your life, that image is magnified; if supreme greatness for you is defined by the clothes of a celebrity, when people see it in your life, and in the way you dress, that is what is magnified, and if supreme greatness for you is defined by an ideal in your career, when people see it in your life, that will be magnified.

The closer we get to imitating that which we consider supremely great in our lives, the greater that person or ideal is praised and glorified in our lives.

- 3) **And the closer we get to becoming more like that person, the closer we get to that ideal in our lives, the greater our joy, the deeper our satisfaction.**
- If supreme greatness for you is defined by the image of a picture perfect family, then the closer you get to it, the greater your joy and satisfaction in it; if supreme greatness for you is defined by the clothes of a celebrity, when it becomes part of your wardrobe and it grows, the greater your joy and satisfaction; if supreme greatness for you is defined by an ideal in your career, as you come closer to achieving it - a promotion or a bigger business - the greater your joy and satisfaction in it.

The closer we get to imitating that which we consider supremely great in our lives, the greater our joy and satisfaction.

So for the Christian, for us as believers, God the Father is most glorified and praised when we imitate Him, and we are brought to supreme joy and satisfaction in Him as we become more like Him.

The question that we need to ask is whether He is the one we consider supremely great in our lives, and whether, in living to imitate greatness as we all do, we consider Him supremely great over everything else in our lives. *Until He assumes the place of pre-eminence, supremacy, and greatness in your life above all things, and until you see Him as the highest treasure in your life, you will not strive or live to imitate Him, and you will not experience joy and satisfaction in God, your Father.*