

Think of the beautiful comparison God sets up: “*Be imitators of God, as dearly loved children.*” What have your dearly loved children done to imitate you? Samuel’s been cooking a lot lately. He’s got a toy kitchen, and he puts eggs and airplanes in the microwave and cooks them up. If you haven’t tried airplane lately, you don’t know what you’re missing! Why does he imitate his mom? Does he do it to earn her love? Of course not! He does it because he is loved. He just wants to be like the one who loves him so much. He has our love, and he loves it, and he wants nothing more than to be like us. Until fifth grade, when he won’t want anything to do with us...

“*Be imitators of God, as dearly loved children.*” You don’t imitate God to get love. You imitate God because you are loved so much. So like a little child with his mom or dad, imitate Jesus in your relationships, especially in your marriage. The more you hear Jesus say, “You are forgiven,” the easier it will be for you to say, “I forgive you.” The more you hear Jesus say, “You are loved,” the easier it will be for you to say, “I love you.” The more you see Jesus sacrifice for you, the easier it will be to sacrifice for him or her. Soak Jesus up. Study Jesus. Like Jimmy Fallon does for some politician. Be so immersed in Jesus that you can’t help imitating Jesus.

Especially with your words. As the great theologian Thumper from Bambi used to say, “If you can’t say something nice, don’t say nothing at all.” He didn’t realize he was quoting Ephesians 4:29. Nothing unwholesome. Only what builds up. What does that look like? On the one side, cut out three “s”. No sarcasm. No shouting. No bitterness. Okay, that’s a “b,” but who’s counting? Those three things destroy marriage. Instead, before you speak, especially if you’re upset, ask yourself one of two questions: “Does this protect my spouse? His reputation? Her heart?” And, “Does this build up my spouse? Does it encourage him or her in her life and faith?” If it doesn’t, it’s got no place in your marriage.

This is why you need Jesus. One of the best illustrations I’ve heard is that our hearts are like buckets. Your goal in life is to fill up your spouse’s bucket with forgiveness, love, and sacrifice—just what he or she needs. The problem is, when you’re pouring out your bucket, something is bound to happen. You’re going to get empty. I have seen two spouses clang against each other like empty buckets. They’re empty. That’s no good! You need Jesus. When it’s hard to forgive, you need to go back to Jesus, who forgives you every time. When it’s hard to love, you need to go back to Jesus, who loves unconditionally. When it’s hard to sacrifice, you need to go back to Jesus, who sacrificed everything. You need Jesus to fill you up, so that you have something to pour into your spouse: Forgiveness, love, and sacrifice. Marriage is simple: “Be Jesus.”

Ephesians 4:29-5:2
Pastor Nathan Nass

Marriage Series #3
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²⁹Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. ³⁰And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. ³¹Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. ³²Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. ¹Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children ²and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

Be Jesus.

As we talk about marriage once more today, one phrase from God’s Word jumped out at me: “*Be imitators of God.*” When I think of an imitator, do you know who comes to mind? Jimmy Fallon. Do you know what I mean? As a comedian, Jimmy Fallon has a knack for studying and watching people so closely that he can imitate their words and mannerisms almost perfectly. I bet you can do it too. You’ve seen the same movie so many times—or you’re around the same person so often—that they become a part of you. You quote it. You imitate them. Like Jimmy Fallon.

The ancient people in Ephesus didn’t have Jimmy Fallon, but they knew exactly what we’re talking about. Do you know where comedy originated? In Greece! The word “comedy” is a combination of two Greek words that mean “party song.” Apparently, “comedy” started when people at parties sang songs in which they teased and imitated public figures. Comedy became so popular that huge outdoor theatres were built for comedy plays. Ephesus—where the Ephesians lived—had one of the biggest theatres in the world. Google it! 25,000 people could fit inside and watch comedy—actors imitating famous people. The early Christians knew about comedy.

So they knew about imitating. I wonder if Paul had that on his mind when he wrote, “*Be imitators of God.*” I don’t say this very often as a pastor, but be like Jimmy Fallon. Imitate. Imitate Jesus. God’s advice for marriage is simple: Be Jesus to your spouse. Like Jimmy Fallon might do for the President, study Jesus. Imitate his words. Imitate his actions. Marriage is simple: Be Jesus!

So, what is Jesus like? What mannerisms does Jesus have? We don’t have to guess. The Bible tell us! First, Jesus forgives. “*Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.*” So how does Jesus forgive? Remember what Jesus said while he was dying on the cross? He looked down at the men who were killing him, and he said, “*Father, forgive them, because they do not know what they are doing*” (Luke 23:34). Here’s how Jesus forgives. He forgives everyone, every time. That’s good

news, right? I've sinned a lot of times. You have too! So Jesus has forgiven us a lot of times. Forgive—every time! That's Jesus!

What else could we imitate from Jesus? How about love? Paul writes: "*Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us...*" Can you think of a Bible verse about Jesus' love? Here's one: "*God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us*" (Romans 5:8). That's love! Jesus' love is unconditional. It doesn't matter what you've done. It doesn't matter who you are. Jesus loved sinners enough to die for us. Forgive—every time. Love—unconditionally. That's Jesus!

We could study Jesus all day, but here's one more word that describes Jesus: Sacrifice. "*Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.*" Think of the sacrifices Jesus made for us. He left heaven. That's where we're trying to go! He let himself get hungry and cold. He let himself get mocked and beaten. Then he died. What did Jesus sacrifice? Everything. For you! Sacrifice means you don't win, but somebody else does, and that gives you great joy! Forgive—every time. Love—unconditionally. Sacrifice—everything. That's Jesus!

Forgiveness, love, and sacrifice... All three attitudes have something in common: All three are a personal choice. They are not feelings. They are choices. Jesus has chosen to forgive you. Jesus has chosen to love you. Jesus has chosen to sacrifice for you. It doesn't depend on us. It all depends on him. And now Jesus turns to you and says, "Imitate me." If you are married, every day you have the opportunity to ask, "How can I forgive, love, and sacrifice for my spouse today?" If those three words would define our marriages, I don't think there would be a single marriage problem in the world! Forgiveness, love, and sacrifice. Marriage is simple: Be Jesus.

It's simple, but not easy. Do you forgive every time? Remember when Peter went to Jesus and asked how many times he had to forgive someone else—up to seven times? That's us, isn't it? There's got to be a limit. Seven sounded like a lot! Remember Jesus' answer? Not seven times. Seventy-seven times—as in, every time. The reality is that your spouse sins against you more than anyone else in the world. And you sin against your spouse more than anyone else in the world too. But who's counting? The moment you start counting, you've lost Jesus. With Jesus, there's no counting. There's forgiveness, every time. Are you putting limits on your forgiveness?

If you are, then I bet you're also putting conditions on your love. Jesus loves unconditionally. When we deserve it and when we don't. What about you? Our love is conditional. There's always an "if." "I'll love him, if he loves me back." "I'll love her, as long as she is beautiful." "I'll love him, if he's kind to me." Sounds reasonable, right? And when the other person breaks their side of the arrangement, it seems to make perfect sense to stop loving them, right? Except that's not Jesus' love. Once the "ifs" start flying, you've lost Jesus. Love is a choice. How often do you chose bitterness and anger over love? I think you know who

loses when you do. You do!

If I'm counting how many times I forgive and putting conditions on my love, then there's one other thing I won't be willing to do: Sacrifice! It's hard to freely give up something for someone else. My plans. My goals. My way. How often do you look at your spouse as someone who gets in the way? As a burden to you? "What am I supposed to do, give in?" "What am I supposed to do, let her get her way?" Yes! It's called sacrifice. Jesus sacrificed everything! If you're not willing to sacrifice, then don't start a relationship with any other person. You've lost Jesus. This is hard! Bitterness pushes out forgiveness. Anger trumps love. Selfishness avoids sacrifice.

Here's where those sins show up most: The way we talk to each other. God knows! He says: "*Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up...*" Here's a sad fact: We say worse things about our spouses than about anybody else. I hope that's not true, but I think it is! We complain about our spouses more than about anybody else. We speak more politely to the cashier at the store than to our own spouse. Paul encourages us to say only what is useful for "*building others up.*" Nothing builds up or tears down your marriage more than the way you talk to your spouse. Have you been building up or tearing down?

The scary part is that Jesus says, "*Out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks*" (Matthew 12:34). What's he saying? Our words are a clear indication of our hearts. If I'm quick to shout, what does that say about what's in here? If bitter words keep coming out, what does that say about what's in here? "*Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice.*" It's not okay! It can feel so natural, but it's not okay! Remember how God describes a marriage? One body. When you tear down your spouse, you tear down yourself.

"Be Jesus." It sounds simple, but it's not easy! That's like telling a little boy who's playing football: "Football is simple. Just play like Tom Brady." "Singing is simple. Just sing like Adele!" "Be Jesus." There's just one problem—you are not Jesus. If you are married, I'm sure your spouse reminds you of that very often. Nothing brings out our sins like marriage does. Imitating Jesus is a whole lot harder than it looks. Forgiving every time. Loving unconditionally. Sacrificing everything. We don't want to that. We can't do that. We don't do that. We're sinners.

It doesn't look good. So let's go back to that simple verse: "*Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children.*" Why do we imitate God? This is so important to understand! We don't imitate God to earn his love. God doesn't say, "Imitate me, and you will get to be my child." We'd never make it! But God says, "*Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children.*" Did you catch it? Why do we imitate God? Because he loves us so much. We are his dearly loved children. You are his God's dearly loved child. God forgives you. God loves you. God sacrificed everything for you—before you did anything! God isn't our example, he's our Savior!