

# THE LIFE

EMBRACING THE LIFE OF A CHRIST-FOLLOWER

PART 1: INTRODUCTION TO DISCIPLESHIP  
LESSON 7: IMITATING GOD

**What we want students to learn:** That much of what it means to be a disciple is wrapped up in this two-word command: “Imitate God.”

**What we want students to do with what they’ve learned:** To consider practical ways they can imitate God in their daily interactions with others.

**Scripture Focus:** Ephesians 5:1-2

**Supporting Scripture:** Galatians 4:4-7; John 13:34-35

**Overview:** We can make discipleship hard to grasp. We can complicate it, albeit unwittingly. But in its simplest form, discipleship can be boiled down to Paul’s command in Ephesians 5:1: “Imitate God.” Discipleship at its core is nothing more than living as Jesus would live. This lesson will challenge your students to grasp this simple definition and help them apply it to their lives.

---

## TEACHER PREP VIDEO

Each **LIFE** lesson comes with a Teacher Prep Video. These are short videos designed to help you grasp the main point of the lesson as you prepare to teach.

To access your **LIFE** lesson 7 Teacher Prep Video, login to your Lesson Manager, navigate to lesson 7, and click on the “Background” tab. You’ll notice the Teacher Prep Video near the top of the Lesson Manager window.

---

## BIBLE BACKGROUND

The *Bible Background* is designed to help you provide some context for the Scripture you’ll be studying. The Details gives you background info for each book, The Setting informs you what’s happening in and around the passage, and The Main Point gives you an overview of how the passage will be used in the lesson.

- **What do we mean by “context”?** In every **YM360** Bible study lesson, you’ll notice we make a point to encourage you to provide the context for the passages you study. By “context” we mean at the very least helping students know **who** wrote the book, **when** it was written, and **why** it was written.
- **What’s the big deal?** When we teach the Bible without giving context, students don’t get a “big picture” understanding of the story of the Bible. But this view is vital to grasping the story of God’s plan of redemption for humankind. As you teach, use the Bible Background to help summarize the context.

## THE DETAILS

- **Author:** The Apostle Paul wrote the letters to the Ephesians. Of course we know Paul as the one-time chief enemy of the Church. After his miraculous conversion on the road to Damascus, Paul would go on to have a position of great importance in the early Church and beyond. He wrote 13 of the 27 books of the New Testament.

# THE LIFE

EMBRACING THE LIFE OF A CHRIST-FOLLOWER

PART 1: INTRODUCTION TO DISCIPLESHIP  
LESSON 7: IMITATING GOD

- **Time frame:** Ephesians was probably written by Paul from prison in the latter years of his life, sometime around 60 or 61 AD.
- **Purpose:** Paul had a very close relationship with the church in Ephesus. It seems as if the motivation for the letter was simply that the church would know how he was faring in his imprisonment. But, true to form, Paul couldn't help but teach. The letter covers general teaching on the work of Christ to redeem believers, unity among believers, and how believers are supposed to conduct themselves.

## THE SETTING

Paul had spent years with the Ephesians, helping them understand the word of God, Jesus, and the Gospel (Acts 19; 20:31). Years later, he wrote this letter to remind them of the grace they received in Jesus and how it should impact their lives. In Ephesians 4, Paul tells the Ephesian church about two ways of "walking" in life: He references walking worthy of God or walking like the world (Eph. 4:1, 17). In Ephesians 5:1-2, Paul sums it all up in a challenge to imitate God, which requires walking in love.

## THE MAIN POINT

After we experience the life changing grace of Jesus, we should begin to reflect God. Literally, we should be "imitators of God" (Ephesians 5:1). Through this lesson, we will see that our motivation for imitating God comes from being His beloved children. We'll briefly look at Galatians 4:4-7 to help us understand what it means to be a child of God. Then we will see that imitating God requires that we "walk in love" like Jesus did (Ephesians 5:2). John 13:34-35 will help us dive deeper into Jesus' teachings about love as the distinguishing marker of His followers. This lesson will help your students know how to practically answer the call to imitate God with their lives.

---

## LESSON PLAN

The *Lesson Plan* contains three elements: An introductory activity called **The Lead In**; the Bible study section called **The Main Event**; and an application-focused segment called **The Last Word**.

---

## THE LEAD IN

- **Goal:** To help students begin contemplating who or what they imitate in life.
- **Set-Up:** Have a bowl, slips of paper, and pens for your students to use.

FIRST, as your students enter have them write the name of a famous person and place it in a bowl. Tell them that the names they write should be instantly recognizable to most people. They should avoid obscure names and names that are just known to your class or church. If you have a smaller group, you may consider having each student submit two or three names.

NEXT, have two students volunteer to compete in an impression competition. The competition is simple: Each student will draw a random slip of paper from the bowl and do an impression of the person written there. They cannot mention the name of the person they are impersonating. Each student doing impressions will have one minute to do as many as possible. Each impression that is correctly guessed by the crowd is worth one point. If the student gets

# THE LIFE

EMBRACING THE LIFE OF A CHRIST-FOLLOWER

PART 1: INTRODUCTION TO DISCIPLESHIP  
LESSON 7: IMITATING GOD

stuck on a particular name, they can call out “pass” and move to the next name in the bowl. The goal is to get the crowd to correctly guess the names on the slips of paper. Have another student track the number of points on a white board or sheet of paper. Also, recruit another student to be the one-minute timekeeper. After both students compete, the student who has the most points is the winner.

FINALLY, explain to students that today is all about learning to imitate. The students who did impressions represented somebody else. They took certain characteristics from that individual and acted them out. In real life, we often imitate others. Our imitations reveal what we value. Say something like:

- **As you may have caught on, we are talking about imitating today. These imitations were prearranged based on your suggestions, but we all have a tendency to imitate others in life whether we mean to or not. You may have thought about it before, but a large part of being a disciple is learning to imitate. This is the first lesson in a three-week study on discipleship and imitation. To start this series of lessons, we are going to look at imitating God. You may think that being a disciple is really complicated or complex, but the goal of being a disciple is becoming like the one that you are following. As disciples of Jesus, our aim is to be like Jesus. We are to imitate Him. As we will see, who or what we imitate shows the world around us what we value.**

Transition into *The Main Event* portion of your lesson.

## THE MAIN EVENT

- **Goal:** To help students understand what it means to imitate God as a disciple.
- **Set Up:** Make sure each student will have access to a copy of the Bible. You will need a dry-erase board and dry erase markers.

FIRST, make three columns on the dry-erase board. At the top of the first, write STUDENT. At the top of the second column, write INFLUENCER. At the top of the third column, write CHARACTERISTIC. Have your students call out the name of a person in their life that has the greatest influence on how they live. Students should choose people who they respect and aspire to be like one day. Try to get three or four students to respond. As students respond, write the student’s name and the influencer’s name in the columns. Once you have your list, go back to each student and ask something like:

- **What is one way that you want to be like this person?**
  - Answers will vary. Write down the things that students say in the CHARACTERISTIC column.

THEN, explain that we often imitate those that have influence in our lives. (We’ll talk more about this in the second lesson of this series.) If Jesus is supposed to have the greatest influence in our lives, we should imitate Him. Read or have a student read Ephesians 5:1. Then, say something similar to the following:

- **Ephesians 5:1 says, “Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children.” God should have incredible influence in our lives for many reasons: His power, His forgiveness, His grace, etc. If we imitate those that influence us, then we look more and more like them. If God is our primary influence, then we grow to look more and more like Him.**

# THE LIFE

EMBRACING THE LIFE OF A CHRIST-FOLLOWER

PART 1: INTRODUCTION TO DISCIPLESHIP  
LESSON 7: IMITATING GOD

NEXT, ask something like:

- **Do you allow God that kind of influence in your life? Explain.**
  - Answers will vary.
- **If not, then what steps do you need to take to change that?**
  - Answers will vary.

THEN, look at Ephesians 5:1 again and point out that the second half of the verse suggests that we imitate God because we are “beloved children.” Ask something like:

- **Why do you think Paul puts that on the end of the command to be an imitator of God?**
  - Answers will vary. While students may understand that God is their heavenly Father and that they are His children, they may not grasp the power of that reality in their lives. Explain that being a beloved child of God describes the kind of relationship that we have with God. It is a major part of our motivation to imitate God. We imitate him because we KNOW all of His actions towards us are loving.

NEXT, read or have a student read Galatians 4:4-7. Notice that in verse 6, Paul writes that we can approach God crying “Abba, Father!” Ask something like:

- **Do you know the significance of the word “Abba” in this verse? What does it mean?**
  - Answers will vary. This would be the equivalent of calling God the Father, “Daddy.”
- **Why does Paul use this term?**
  - Answers will vary. Tim Keller writes, “Because Jesus Christ used it in talking to His Father (Mark 14:36). It was a daringly familiar term to use to address the Lord Almighty.” Jesus shared a close personal relationship with His heavenly Father while He was on earth. Through Jesus, we have the same access to God the Father that Jesus had in His time on earth.
- **What does being a child of God mean for you according to this passage of Scripture?**
  - Answer: Adopted; no longer slaves; heirs of God

THEN, say something like:

- **We have been given the full rights and privileges that come with being a child of a loving God, including complete access to the Father no matter what happens. We are fully heirs of God, meaning that His promises in Scripture immediately apply to our lives. God graciously gives us all these things and more because He is a good Father to those He has adopted into His family. Just as a good Father has incredible influence in his child’s life, God wants to influence our lives. Just as a child imitates a good father, so God wants us to imitate Him.**

NEXT, go back to the white board and write “You” under STUDENTS and “God” under INFLUENCER. Ask something like:

- **Name some of the characteristics of God that we should imitate in our lives.**
  - Answers will vary. List those characteristics. After you have a good list, point out how many of these characteristics are similar to the characteristics of a disciple as outlined in Scripture. By simply imitating God, we make great strides toward growing as disciples.

# THE LIFE

EMBRACING THE LIFE OF A CHRIST-FOLLOWER

PART 1: INTRODUCTION TO DISCIPLESHIP  
LESSON 7: IMITATING GOD

THEN, read or have a student read Ephesians 5:2. Point out that there is a specific characteristic that we are called to imitate within the character of God: love. Specifically, this is “agape” love, which is the kind of love that God displays for us. It is not the same as love for tacos or love for a boyfriend or girlfriend. This is the kind of unstoppable, committed, and faithful love that God consistently demonstrates to His followers throughout Scripture and still today. Whenever we think about Jesus, there are many characteristics that we see, but the one that Paul points out here is love. Ask something like:

- **How does Ephesians 5:2 prove that Jesus loved us?**
  - Answer: He gave himself up for us. He sacrificed Himself for us.
- **Can you truly love someone if you never demonstrate it?**
  - Answers may vary. Allow students to wrestle with this idea for a moment. The point is to show students that love is a powerful feeling, but it must be expressed in action in order for another person to experience it.

NEXT, read or have a student read John 13:34-35. Here we see Jesus placing a huge emphasis on love. In the context of this passage of Scripture, Jesus had just finished demonstrating His love to His disciples by washing their feet. He challenged His disciples to imitate the love that He modeled for them. Ask something like:

- **Clearly, Jesus wanted His disciples to be identified by their love. When people think about Christians in our culture and time, what kinds of characteristics do you think come to mind?**
  - Answers may vary. The point is to get students thinking about some of the positive and negative characteristics that Christians have inherited in our culture.

THEN, go back to the three columns that you wrote down earlier. If Jesus is the greatest influencer in our life, then love should be the greatest characteristic that we exhibit in life. Elsewhere in Scripture, the apostle John wrote in 1 John 4:16, “So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.” To imitate God we must demonstrate love! Say something like this:

- **Jesus says clearly in John 13:34-35 that if we imitate Him, love will be at the top of the list of characteristics that we should exhibit. This was Paul’s point as well in Ephesians 5:2. If we imitate God, we will walk in love just like Jesus walked in love. As we imitate God, we should grow in love and others should be able to see this demonstrated in our lives. Remember, love can be an emotion or feeling, but in order for other people to see it in our lives we must demonstrate it. In Ephesians 5:2, we read about Jesus demonstrating His love through His sacrifice on the cross. In John 13, we read about Jesus commanding His disciples to love immediately after he demonstrated love by washing their feet. Just as Jesus demonstrated love, so should we!**

Challenge your students to contemplate how their life is demonstrating love to those around them. Have them ponder the following thought: If people were to look at my life, would they see Jesus imitated through me? Would they experience tangible demonstrations of love? If we imitate God in life, love will flow from us.

FINALLY, ask your students to flesh out what it means to “walk in love” in tangible, real world ways. Ask something like:

- **So, this week how can we demonstrate love to those around us? How can we imitate God through loving others the way that God loves us?**
  - Answers will vary. The point is to get your students thinking out loud about practical steps they can take to demonstrate love to others as they imitate God.

# THE LIFE

EMBRACING THE LIFE OF A CHRIST-FOLLOWER

PART 1: INTRODUCTION TO DISCIPLESHIP  
LESSON 7: IMITATING GOD

Ask if there are any questions, then transition into *The Last Word*.

## THE LAST WORD

---

- **Goal:** To help students evaluate if they are imitating God in life and to take practical steps to begin imitating Him.
- **Set-Up:** Sheets of paper and writing utensils.

FIRST, have your students draw a line down the center of their piece of paper. On the left side of the line have them write out the top 10 traits that characterize their lives. Encourage them to be honest with themselves. If there are characteristics that are unflattering, they should still write them out. They will not be asked to share what they write out on this side of the line. Give students just two minutes or less to complete this portion of the activity. Tell them not to overthink it, but just write it out.

THEN, have your students move to the right side of the line they drew. Have them write out the top 10 characteristics that they want to be known for. Since we have been talking about imitating God, these characteristics should reflect Him. Since we know that “love” is a major characteristic of God’s, it should probably make the list. Give students just two minutes or less to complete this portion of the activity.

NEXT, explain to your students that if there is anything on the left hand side of the line that does not reflect God or actually does come from sin in our lives, Jesus gives us grace and forgiveness for these things. Jesus also wants to work in and through our lives to create new characteristics in us that better reflect Him. Say something like:

- **All of us have characteristics in our lives that we wish did not describe us. Liar, cheater, lustful, unfaithful, etc. However, Jesus knows and understands that these are our struggles. He does not excuse our sin, but He did die to pay the penalty for it. If we know Jesus as Lord and Savior, we have been shown incredible grace for the characteristics that are sinful our lives. At the same time, we have been given strength from the Spirit of God and wisdom from the Word of God to move away from sinful characteristics toward characteristics that reflect God. In the power of God, we can become imitators of God that look more and more like Him each day.**

THEN, have your students place their lists in their Bibles or in another place where they can revisit it. This list will be used later this week in one of their devotional times.

FINALLY, have your students break into smaller groups for a time of prayer. Have them share two of the characteristics from the right side of their paper. What are the characteristics that imitate God that they want to be known for? Have these students pray for one another, each person praying for the person on the right. Have students ask God to help the person they are praying for to grow in exhibiting godly characteristics in life. If you have a larger group and some additional adults available, you might encourage your adults to be a part of each group to keep the prayer time focused. This prayer time should last 2-3 minutes.

# THE LIFE

EMBRACING THE LIFE OF A CHRIST-FOLLOWER

PART 1: INTRODUCTION TO DISCIPLESHIP  
LESSON 7: IMITATING GOD

Afterward, close the group in prayer and encourage your students to continually imitate God with their lives.

- Don't forget to distribute the devotions to your students this week. If you're posting them on Instagram, or some other means of electronic distribution, make sure you inform students of when they will be receiving them.
- Use the **Social Media** guide to stay in touch with students via text or Instagram, and to encourage them to follow through with reading their devotions.

---

## WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU . . .

- Do you have questions about a lesson?
- Something that worked particularly well you want to share?
- Something that didn't work you want to bring up?

We value your feedback! Please do not hesitate to email us with your questions, comments, or concerns, at [feedback@youthministry360.com](mailto:feedback@youthministry360.com).