

Being Walking Questions Marks

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[0 : 00] Wonderful. Well, good morning, everyone. It's lovely to have you with us today. Thank you so much for joining in. Thank you, Archie, for leading us this far and Danny for reading that passage in Ephesians 5 for us.

Let me encourage you to grab a Bible or get it on a screen on your phone or something like that and come with me to God's Word. And thank you so much, Archie, for praying for us as well as we come to this text this morning.

So Ephesians chapter 5. And as we dive in today, let me tell you about a guy I once heard about during my time at university. And it was common knowledge, apparently, that the girls in his class had a nickname for him.

OK, ready for this? They had a nickname for him. They called him the Untouchable, which probably when you say like that sounds a bit harsh. But stick with me. Here's why they called him the Untouchable.

So where they were kind of joking around in class, as they were mucking around down the pub, when they were out and about doing their usual thing in the clubs in town, when they were interested in scoring with the boys, oh, this guy was there. This guy was a laugh. This guy was their friend.

[1 : 12] And though they would have loved for him to have joined in, it became so crystal clear because this guy was a follower of Jesus. That he just wasn't up for playing ball.

Right? So they called him the Untouchable. Question for you. Why would somebody choose to live differently?

Why would somebody choose not to get involved? Who would choose to be the kind of person that I always call in my mind, I call a walking question mark?

Right? You ever met somebody like that where you kind of watch them in action and you try and figure out what makes them tick and you conclude to yourself, I just can't figure them out? Walking question mark.

Yeah, thing is, Ephesus, this letter written to the Ephesian Christians, Ephesus, I'm sure, is full of walking question marks. Come with me, picture this scene.

[2 : 12] Right? Imagine Chris the Christian. Right? You got him in your head? Chris the Christian. Right? One morning, there's a knock at his door. And it's his friends. Chris, mate, how you doing?

How you doing? Listen, we're off into town. Just taking a wee stroll. You coming? You know, plan is, we'll take a stroll. We'll see some friends. We'll take a trip to the temple of Artemis.

We'll wander about, maybe make some money, maybe even pick up a girl at the temple and we'll get up to some mischief. I mean, come on, bro. You love this stuff. Grab your coat. Grab your coat.

I'm all waiting. Make a day of it. And Chris replies, Guys, no thanks. That just isn't really me anymore.

And his mates look at each other bemused. Right? What's getting him? What's happening to crazy Chris? Remember this guy that used to live for this stuff?

[3 : 10] What's happened? Question, what explains 21st century uni guy and 1st century Chris?

Right? What explains it? Well, here's what I love. Question mark. Ephesians chapter 5 gives us an exclamation mark.

Right? Here's why I love this passage. This passage explains why you would choose to do that. Okay? Ephesians 5 explains it. Come with me to verse chapter 1.

Here is the central idea of this passage. Paul says to these believers, he says, be imitators of God. Right?

Friends, get that in your lungs. Right? Be imitators of God. And here's, I think, the logic of what he's trying to get them to see at verse 1.

[4 : 09] Okay, you ever notice that you kind of pick up things from your parents? You ever notice that in your life? Right? I remember the first time somebody said to me, they said, see when you get excited, have you ever noticed, have you ever stopped to think about why you rub your hands together?

Right? What's that all about? Do you know what? Never occurred to me before. Never occurred to me before. But do you know what? The next time I went home, watching the football one night, I hear a rub of the hands coming from the other sofa.

Right? Hear the hand rub. It's my dad. And I go, oh, that's where I get the hand rub thing from. You know, those kind of things that we pick up from our parents. So when Paul says here at verse 1, he says, imitate God.

Do you see what he's saying? He's saying, as God's children, right? Be like your heavenly father. Pick up his character traits.

Be like him. And so it follows, if you jump on the train of thought, we'll go to where it's going. Where's the train going? That if your father is holy, that if your father is light, if your father is so far above the things of this earth, and if your father is the very essence of love, well, like father, like son.

[5 : 34] Okay? Mimic your heavenly father. Reflect your heavenly father. You want to know what that looks like? Have a look at the son. Have a look at the Christ who came and showed us perfectly the father.

Right? It means when we're looking at Jesus in action in the gospels, we are gazing deep into the very heart of God. There's no inconsistency between the two. Jesus Christ who gave himself up for us.

Do you see the language there? Fragrant offering. The sacrifice. It's Leviticus language. Christ, the perfect offering for our sin.

Pleasing in God's sight. What does that mean? It means that we are right with our God. We are known by our creator. His spirit dwells within us.

It means that we are his new people of light. We are his children of light. And so Paul says, imitate your heavenly father.

[6 : 43] Be holy as he is holy. Right? Imitate him in the marketplace. Imitate him as you spend time with your mates.

Imitate him as you play your sport. Imitate him as you do business. Imitate him. Do you see, Paul is no advocate of come out and hide.

This is staying and shine. Staying and shine. Christ, and I take it that's what's going on in verse 14, as Christ shines on us.

Staying and shine. I mean, how good was that moon last night? Do you see it? People texting me, look at the moon, look at the moon. It never happens. But how good was that moon last night?

Really simple question. Do you know why the moon is bright? Right? Kind of primary school question, really, but go with me. Do you know why the moon is bright? Because the sun shines in it. Okay?

[7 : 40] And I like to play this game in the darkness, right? There it is. I like to play this game. There is the moon going, wow. Right? Hey, hey, don't look at me. Don't look at me.

I'm just rock dust and craters. Don't look at me. Look at the sun. Look at the one who is shining on me. Look how great he is. He's lit me up. How great is the sun?

I'm already reflecting about three to 12% of his light. I Googled it, right? How great is the sun? Paul says, shine for Christ.

Imitate him as Christ shines on you, right? Be walking question marks in your city of Ephesus. And what's that going to look like?

Well, let's move, if you like, from the general principle to the specific application. Because Paul puts his finger on one area in particular, where to imitate God will mean, boy, these Ephesians are going to stand out like a sore thumb.

[8 : 46] Right? And it's this whole area of how they conduct themselves sexually. Okay? Ephesus, this is a highly sexualized culture.

Right? What was that? What's that song from the 90s that Salt-N-Pepa sang? Right? Let's talk about sex. It was one of the anthems of the 90s, right? Lyrics. Now we talk about sex on the radio and video shows.

Many will know that anything goes. Right? They loved that song in Ephesus in the first century. Loved it. Right? Virgin women at the temple helping you worship.

They're offering you a sacred sexual encounter. A culture where you're encouraged to kind of just let your desires go. And the more you do that, the more that you're living.

And these Christians are caught up right in the middle of that. Okay? In a previous life, they saw no issue with this. They said, what's the problem?

[9 : 42] Bring it on. But do you see how Paul writes at verse 8? He says, you were once darkness. Right? That was you. You were there. No spiritual lights on in your life.

This used to be you. But now, verse 8, you are light in the Lord. God has switched the spiritual lights on in your life. And Christ has shined.

He's shining on you. So to be an imitator of God in Ephesus, to be a walking question mark, what is that going to mean? Specifically in this highly sexualized culture, I just want us to see two things.

Okay? Firstly, it's going to mean them saying no to the darkness. No to the darkness. Right? In terms of their walk and in terms of their talk.

So see verse 3, the things that he specifically mentions. Right? When it comes to their walk. And I assume that these things are all connected. Back to our central theme. Sexual immorality, impurity, covetousness.

[10 : 46] And then when it comes to their talk, do you see verse 4? No filthiness, no foolish talk, no crude joking. And I take it that these are telltale signs that the people who are living in these things have refused God's reign, are living in darkness, and are deserving of God's wrath.

Paul said they've got no place amongst God's holy people. And so do you see how radically different these Christians will be simply by using the word no.

not because they've moved out of Ephesus, but because God's spirit has moved into them. They're going to be walking question marks in their city.

And so the question becomes, what will it mean to be a walking question mark in our city in terms of our walk and our talk? And really, it's not going to look any different, is it?

I mean, to believe in the goodness of God's design for sex, that this is a good gift from Him, that He's designed to be enjoyed in the context of a marriage between one man and one woman.

[12 : 04] And I take it that that term, sexual immorality, in the Greek there, it's almost a catch-all term for everything that goes on outside of that framework, God's good design. And for us to not just simply reluctantly go with that design, but love that design and affirm it.

Flowing from a heart that says, do you know what, I'm going to love the people of my city. I'm going to love my neighbor who thinks differently to that. Pursuing them in the same way that Christ pursues people in the Gospels and telling them about Jesus.

And all the while, I'm going to abide by God's blueprint for sex. No matter how difficult it is, no matter what it costs me, because I know the God whose word this is, I know who He is, I know that He is my good Father, and I love Him, and I trust Him with my life.

How different are you going to look if you believe that and live that out? Which, to be clear, we do. Walking question marks in our city.

Let me just ask you as we think about this. Friends, when was the last time you said no to something because you wanted to imitate your Heavenly Father?

[13 : 26] Right? These are tough times that we're living in. I think this is even more relevant. Right? When was the last time you said no to looking at that website?

Right? You said no to watching that Netflix drama that everyone's watching, that box set that everyone's binging on because it's got images that just aren't helpful for me.

It's got scenes that just aren't great for me to be watching. When was the last time you said no to staying over at someone's house? You know what? Because it might be a bit more convenient, but it's just not a wise thing to do.

When was the last time you said no to joining in the bad banter in the changing room? You know, I think so often our problem in this area is not that people think we're strange.

Our problem is that people don't think we're strange enough. Okay, verse 7. I take it this is caught up in this language here. Paul was saying, do not be partners with them. See that God has called you to something so much more glorious and say no because you want to imitate your glorious heavenly Father.

[14 : 37] And I had the words of that old hymn by William Cowper in my head this week. To see the law by Christ fulfilled to hear his pardoning voice changes a slave into a child and changes duty into choice.

Perhaps you're watching this and you've got the words of another song in your head, right? A song about Coldplay, Chris Martin.

Nobody said it was easy, but no one ever said it would be this hard. And friends, I take it. I know that this is not easy. We have all made mistakes.

We all have regrets. We all are broken. I know I certainly am in one way or another when we come to think about this whole area of sex. And I take it that we as a church, we long to be the kind of church family that is listening, that is supporting, that is loving, that is honest and that genuinely wants the best for one another, that's willing to go the extra mile to help.

And the kind of community one that is just speaking the truth of the gospel into one another's lives like we thought about a couple of weeks ago, just helping one another, speaking the truth of love into one another's lives, reminding ourselves, each other about our Father who is all compassion and who specializes in creating trophies of his redeeming grace.

[16 : 15] It's reminding one another about Jesus, who he is, as we see him in the gospels. I love that he's never running away from people who have got sexual question marks above them.

He's never standing over them, condemning them. He is moving alongside them in grace and love and reminding ourselves of the holy calling this God has made on our lives and walking with one another lovingly to the foot of the cross as the place where we will find forgiveness and life.

Friends, to be a walking question mark in this whole area is going to mean us saying no to things. And flip that around if you like, that's the defense.

If you flip that around in the offense here, to be a walking question mark is going to mean them saying yes to the light. Right? No to the darkness.

Yes to the light. Again, in terms of their walk and in terms of their talk. Verse 10, see what he says. He says, find out what pleases the Lord. Right? Love that. Find out.

[17 : 24] Get involved. Use your initiative. Engage your brain and get in the word. Find out. Find out what pleases your heavenly Father. Invite others into your life who are going to be able to help you and lovingly come alongside you.

It's kind of what happens when you fall in love, isn't it? You just find out what makes the other person happy. I want to know what makes them happy. Right? What chocolates do they like?

What music are they into? What hobbies do they have? What food do they love? Where do they love to go? Paul says, find out what pleases your heavenly Father. Find out what pleases the Lord.

And I do it. Right? Verse 4, come with me. No obscene talk, not foolishness, not crude jokes, but thanksgiving should be coming out of your mouths.

I mean, how distinctly different, friends, if we are a community that is known for talk that is thankful.

[18 : 28] Right? I was reminded this week of the words of the late Billy Graham who said, a spirit of thankfulness is one of the most distinctive marks of a Christian whose heart is attuned to the Lord.

I heard a cracking story this week from a friend Andy who was telling me about an older lady in his congregation over in Glasgow and she was telling him how she was just really getting quite down with everything that was going on just now and just finding herself slipping into an attitude of just moaning about things.

So she decided to put a stop to it and try and cultivate this attitude of thanksgiving. So what she made herself do every day is to go into her kitchen and grab her tomato timer.

Right? Remember those things, those tomato timers if you don't remember what it is or you're of a younger generation, get on Google, write a tomato timer. She used to take it and wind it up to two minutes and then sit it down on the kitchen table and listen to it tick, tick, tick, tick, tick, tick.

And what she used to do was take those two minutes and deliberately list everything in her life that she was thankful to God for until the tomato timer ran out.

[19 : 36] Love that. Thanksgiving. Are we a thankful people, friends? Is this what pours forth from our mouths thanksgiving to who our God is?

And then maybe think about one way that that might work out in this whole area of sexual relationships. Let me just pitch you something here. And there was a comedy film that came out a number of years ago, I think, starring Steve Carell.

It was a comedy and it was called The 40-Year-Old Virgin. Right? And it was about this middle-aged man who had never had sex and the whole premise of the film was that here is a man who hasn't lived.

Have pity for him. He hasn't lived. It's how the world thinks, isn't it? What the world promotes. Friends, you see how the Christian can look at something like that and declare not true.

Not true. You know, in the words of Jackie Hill Perry who's written so wonderfully about her journey as a disciple of Jesus and discovering the God of the Bible in her book that's called Gay Girl, Good God, she writes, our sexuality is not our soul, marriage is not heaven and singleness is not hell.

[20 : 55] Right? The Christian can look at something like that and declare that there is a better story that defines my life. Right? I'm not defined by my relationship status on Facebook or how I look or what I've done in the past and who I've done it with or my so-called future prospects.

I'm not defined by any of those things. I am defined by Jesus Christ and what God my Father says is true about me. And what has God said is true about us?

Well, I think this is where we need to get back to chapter one. The more I've been preaching this through, everything's connected to the identity that Paul is out of the Christian in chapter one. Who are you, Christian?

You are one who has been loved by God the Father. You are one who has been adopted into his family. You are one who has been redeemed by God the Son who gave himself for you.

You are one who has been sealed by God the Spirit with a glorious, untouchable, heavenly inheritance ahead of you. That is what defines you.

[22 : 05] That is what defines you. It has to do with these other things. That is what defines you. And because of that, whatever comes our way in life, we can say that I am thankful.

I am thankful to God. You know, whoever you are here watching this today, maybe you've got huge questions about this stuff, but let me just tell you, friends, there is only one person, only one person who can give us life.

And life to the full is what he promises. And his name is Jesus. You see, the Christian is one who can say, whatever my lot, my heart can say, it is well with my soul.

My heart can say, whatever is going on in my life, that Jesus Christ is enough. And that's where we want to be, isn't it? That's where we want to be.

That is where life is to be found, that Jesus Christ is enough for me. Friends, I take it that if we try and live this way, if we are dangerously different for Christ, then naturally the light that shines from us is going to expose the darkness.

[23 : 20] I think that's what Paul's on about there at verse 13. It's kind of what happens if you change a light bulb, isn't it? Or stand next to a light bulb. Oh, just exposes you, doesn't it? I had that experience the other night, just changing a light bulb outside or flashlight.

Vroomf. That's what happens, isn't it, when you're exposed by the light. Friends, that's what we're doing when we're saying no to the world's way, no to the darkness, and yes to God's way, yes to the light.

And I think that should encourage us in our witness because when that happens, even the smallest step of obedience to your heavenly Father, that is the light invading the darkness as the world looks in and says, I cannot figure that out.

Why would somebody choose to live that way? The light is invading the darkness. Friends, so as we close, let's come back to our two guys at the top.

What explains 21st century uni guy? What explains the untouchable? And what explains first century Chris living his life as a disciple of Jesus in Ephesus?

[24 : 25] What explains that? Why would somebody choose to live differently? Why would somebody not want to get involved? Why would somebody choose to be a walking question mark?

What's that all about? Answer, because they love Jesus. They love their heavenly Father and their heart's desire is that they want to imitate him.

A song that we sometimes sing here and I'm reminded of this this week and let's make this our prayer as we head into this week coming. Refiner's fire. My heart's one desire is to be holy.

Set apart for you, Lord. I choose to be holy. Set apart for you, my master. ready to do your will.

Let's pray together. Heavenly Father, I'm so conscious, Lord, of the many questions that will come out of this passage today, of the many different experiences that we'll have, of the many different current places that we'll find ourselves in, and the many different situations that we're each trying to work out.

[25 : 44] And I pray, Father, that you would help us each today by your Spirit who lives in us. Help us remember the gospel. Help us remember Jesus Christ and him crucified.

And a gospel that is the power of God unto salvation. And it's the power for us to change. So, Father, help us today. Thank you that you are the God of all comfort.

And I pray, Father, that as your word goes forth today, that your Spirit would both challenge us who need to be challenged, and would comfort us who need to be comforted.

Oh, our Father, we want all the glory to be to you this week in our lives. Help us to imitate you. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.