

Discipleship 101: Living Like Jesus
By Jason Huff
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Galatians 5:22-23; Luke 6:40; Romans 12:2

Our third and final scripture reading today comes from Romans 12:2. May God bless the reading of His holy, sacred, and perfect Word. “Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is -- his good, pleasing and perfect will.”

There's an age-old question: “What do you want to be when you grow up?” For millennia, that question was already answered for you – you became what your parents were, because they were the ones who raised you and trained you in the professions they knew. Rarely did someone step outside those boundaries. That's not been true for many years now, and the answers have changed.

Some are things that are right of the moment – for example, a new dream job is “YouTube influencer.” The top job for an 8-9 year old is “video game designer.” Some are unrealistic. By far, the number one job of choice for kids is professional athlete. But a lot of them have stayed stable over the years. Top choices still are doctor, teacher, and veterinarian. Surprisingly, for young girls, doctor is the top ranked choice at 17%, beating out the second choice of teacher by 10% points. When you look at the lists on the whole, there are some good trends – most of the jobs, whether firefighter, police officer, doctor, or teacher, are jobs meant to help others.

But are we pointing kids towards the wrong things? At ages 2-4, kids often want to become parents when they grow up. Those quickly fall off the charts after that point. Psychologist Adam Grant wrote in an essay, “When you're asked what you want to be when you grow up, it's not socially acceptable to say, “A father,” or, “A mother,” let alone, “A person of integrity.” This might be one of the reasons many parents say their most important value for their children is to care about others, yet their kids believe that top value is success. When we define ourselves by our jobs, our worth depends on what we achieve.”

I start off with this discussion because this question is integral to our discussion of discipleship. As we look at the basics of discipleship, we ask ourselves, “What are our lives supposed to look like as Christians?” Because for Christians, the answer to the question, “What do you want to be when you grow up?” should be, “More like Jesus.” That's not the answer we want or what the surveys are looking for. It's a fundamental shift in the way we think and live. The world wants to define us by our careers and our success. But God defines us very differently – as His sons and daughters, His adopted children brought into His family and given His Kingdom. And so, as we move into this new section of Discipleship 101, we want to start looking at a paradigm: how we can live more like Jesus lived.

Once again, I want to do a brief recap of where we've been so far in this series so that, even if you're coming in now, you get a simple portrait of what being a disciple of Jesus means. As a disciple, we understand the path of human history through God's perfect creation, the fall of humanity into sin, God's redemption plan through Jesus for all who believe, and God's restoration of all things, making His new heaven and new earth far better than they were originally. We understand the overwhelming nature of God's grace, shown to us in Jesus, and that following Jesus starts with grace because grace has been shown to us. We also learned last week that quiet time, prayer, Bible study, and worship are keys to a closer relationship with God.

When we spent that time with God, we recognize the call to become more like Jesus. The question then becomes, how? If we are indeed Christians, if we believe that Jesus did come and save us from sin, if we have become disciples, then God has given us the Holy Spirit to lead us, to guide us, and to make it possible that we *can* actually become more like Jesus. It's a genuine possibility. But to live like Jesus, we've got to look at Jesus' life and see what's there.

There are many traits that Jesus exemplified; He was a person of integrity, so His actions matched His teachings. Some of the ones we'll touch on, we all could probably guess. But I want to start with the one way we can live like Jesus that affects all the rest – even maybe the ones that are ultimately more important. It's this: *Jesus lived in full faith and trust that the Father is good and that the Father's will for Him was best.*

Trusting that God has our best interests at heart and that we should be pursuing His will for us regularly undergirds all the other ways we can live like Jesus. Because without that trust, all the other traits start to lose their weight. Because exercising the fruits of the Spirit we heard about this morning is no guarantee of a kind response in return. Jesus warned the disciples of coming persecution, and told the people listening to the Sermon on the Mount that they would be blessed when they were persecuted for the sake of righteousness. Living like Jesus can get you in a lot of trouble, even with people that you'd think would be with you! Without trust that God is sovereignly in control, living like Jesus will cause you heartache but not return you dividends.

Jesus showed His explicit trust in the Father's will often. Right after His baptism, the Holy Spirit sends Jesus out into the wilderness for forty days. This is not Jesus' will but the Father's will. To fast for forty days and then have the devil tempt you is not something Jesus in His human nature would have desired, but He submitted Himself to the Father's will. Before the cross in the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus is clear that He is following the Father's plan, not His own. And in John 5:19, Jesus says, "The Son can do nothing by Himself; He does only what He sees the Father doing. Whatever the Father does, the Son also does."

What does this mean for us? It means the best way for us to start every day is entrusting it to the Father. It means giving the day over to Him. Now God doesn't speak to us in the same manner that He spoke to Jesus; we aren't going to find every moment of our days planned. But the Father's will for us is that we might act like Jesus. When we entrust the day to the Father, we give Him authority over us. That whatever happens, good or bad, we will do whatever is in our power through the Holy Spirit to live out the traits of Jesus. That no matter what trials we face or blessings we encounter, we will trust God and move forward in faith.

Living in faith and trust when things are good prepares to live that way when things are not. Jesus was prepared for the cross by spending time with the Father daily. He was prepared for the hardships of His ministry because He trusted the Father loved Him. And so, for us, I encourage you to put your trust in God right now. That He loves you, that He has saved you, and that no matter what God asks of you, it is for your benefit and the benefit of God's Kingdom. As Isaiah 55:6 says, "Seek the LORD while he may be found; call on him while he is near." Ecclesiastes 12:1, which can be very pessimistic, tells us, "Remember your Creator while you are still young, before the bad days come." If we trust in Him before tragedy strikes, that faith will sustain us through the troubles, just as it sustained Jesus through the cross.

If we have that faith and trust, we can move on to the fruit of the Spirit, and the trait most demonstrated by Jesus throughout His earthly life: *love*. In John 13:34-35, Jesus commands the apostles to love one another as He has loved them, saying, "By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." Love like Jesus is uncommon. The Greek word *agape* is used almost exclusively in the New Testament; it is rarely found in other Greek literature. *Agape* is different from brotherly love, family love, and romantic love.

Our world is so confused about love is – and so are we – that we must define it carefully. *Agape* love, the kind of love we can live out like Jesus, is self-less; in fact, it's self-sacrificing. It's love that is, according to C. S. Lewis, "passionately committed to the well-being of others." *Agape* love is unconditional, meaning that it isn't deserved, and *agape* love is nonreciprocal – it expects nothing in return. It's not only the love of neighbor, but it's the love of the unattractive, unwelcoming, unremarkable, even immoral neighbor. *Agape* love has grace baked right into it.

Agape love that we want to emulate got Jesus into a lot of trouble. Jesus was criticized by the religious leaders for hanging out with the wrong crowd, with tax collectors and sinners. Rather than routing around Samaritan territory like His countrymen did, avoiding contact with the despised half-Jewish half-pagan people, Jesus went straight through Samaria, preaching and healing along the way. Jesus would talk with Greeks and Romans, anyone who came to Him. He lost the "religious" people because He went after lost and hurting people.

When Jesus did His miracles, often people were ungrateful. Ten lepers are cleansed, but only one – a Samaritan – comes back to thank Him. He casts out demons from a man, and the town promptly asks Jesus to leave. Jesus' hometown of Nazareth rejects Him, and He only does a few miracles there because others don't come to Him. One man who has made a living begging beside a pool is healed, and when the Pharisees question him about carrying his mat on the Sabbath, he blames it on Jesus. The crowds who followed Jesus for a free meal leave Him when He chides them for not wanting to know Him, who could give them eternal life. And yet Jesus healed and performed miracles anyway.

The Pharisees came against Jesus and made themselves His enemies, but Jesus loves them too. He meets with Nicodemus at night and shares with him that he must be born again. He goes and eats with every Pharisee who invites Him in. Jesus gives them dire warnings, but even those are out of love for them. He wants them to repent of their wickedness and acknowledge that they too are sinners like the people they condemn. Time and again, Jesus shows compassion on the wayward, the unlikeable, and the undeserving.

Paul told us what Jesus' love looked like in 1 Corinthians 13. He says, "Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails."

This kind of love is wholly unnatural to us. We love our friends well. If our families are halfway decent, we love them. Jesus says even evil people know how to give good gifts to their children! Tax collectors love those who love them! Pagans greet their friends! We shouldn't assume that we are loving like Jesus loved if we just show love to people who like us. The world knows how to do that well enough because it's self-serving. It's in our own best interests to love *some* people – the ones who can make things happen for us, who make us feel good, who give us what we want.

Jesus' love is very different from that. It is love full of grace. Jesus loved us enough to go to the cross for us even though we were sinners undeserving of that love. And so, when we want to live like Jesus, we need to love like Jesus. It doesn't mean we're going to get ourselves killed for someone else; there can only be one Jesus. But it does mean giving our love and affection, our time and efforts, our treasures and talents, to people who may never respond to us, may never respond to Jesus, who may hate us because of our goodness and compassion.

This is a very hard thing in a society that puts such a premium on merit. We argue that we *deserve* things, sometimes we argue that we've *earned* them, and that good things should only go to the deserving. We also live in a society divided among so many different lines; as we've seen in the last week, we've become a nation of red and blue divided against one another rather than red, white, and blue united.

But Christian love crosses those lines. Christian love bakes a casserole for the guy next door with COVID who never cuts his grass and keeps a beat up '87 Chevy on the lawn. Christian love gives a sack of groceries to the guy on the corner with a handwritten sign, and doesn't stop giving if the person is upset they didn't get cash or if they took the gift and bought booze. Christian love welcomes the addict back after the first relapse and the fifteenth. Christian love takes a bitter word from a bitter person and dismisses it, and doesn't keep track of how many bitter words have been spoken over the years. Christian love extends the hand of friendship to the guy who voted for the other guy we think is a terrible choice.

And Christian love, if we look at all these things, isn't warm fuzzy feelings. It's action. We are only occasionally told second-hand how Jesus felt. We normally see how He felt only through what He did. And we're not commanded to have specific feelings. The fruit of the Spirit – love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control – those are actions, not feelings. Christian love is acting out of love despite our feelings. Feelings often betray us; following our feelings is often dangerous. But often, when we act loving, eventually we feel loving too. We act kindly, we start to become kindly. Practicing the actions is the best way to also start to have the feelings we want to have.

There are many more traits of Jesus we want to live into, obviously. Next week we will talk about serving like Jesus. But trust and love are major traits for Christians, and the final one we'll talk about today is incredibly important for us to strive after: *Jesus was a man of integrity*. Jesus is striking because He lives in integrity despite the consequences. He lives out what He preaches. When the devil offers him everything in the world for a moment of worship, knowing the cross is ahead of Him, Jesus says no. He does not change His attitude towards the Pharisees to win their approval or to keep Himself from harm, or even to attempt to bring some of them into the Kingdom. He is not a salesman. He has the opportunity several times to seize power with a large number of people behind Him and refuses it. He deliberately separates Himself from crowds after teaching them so that they do not attempt to make Him messiah by force.

Because Jesus lived in complete integrity, people experience amazing effects. Paul repeats an ancient Greek proverb that "bad company corrupts good character," and that's often the case. But Jesus' integrity is so complete that bad characters – people who had sinned for a long time – change after meeting Him rather than the other way around. By the biblical law of the Old Testament, for impure people (which is everyone), touching something unclean makes you unclean. But Jesus, in His perfect integrity, touches the unclean and they become clean. True integrity cannot be corrupted, and it brings about a great influence for righteousness.

Integrity is hard in our world. Many of the ideal figures in the Old Testament fell short. Peter abandoned Jesus at His moment of greatest need. Later, after having the Holy Spirit, Peter fell into the trap of believing that non-Jewish believers had to follow all the Jewish customs to be saved, until Paul and others corrected him. Mark, who wound up writing his gospel with Peter, abandoned Paul on his first missionary journey, and Paul didn't fully reconcile with him until much later in his life. James, the brother of Jesus, said, "We all stumble in many ways." And yet, Paul was willing to say, "Be imitators of me as I am an imitator of Christ." In as much as we imitate Christ, we can have integrity and can set an example for others.

The modern world doesn't make it easy. We relate to many different groups – our families, our co-workers, our friends, our church family, our acquaintances. The question is, are we the same to them all, showing the love of Christ and acting like Him no matter which group we are with? When we're by ourselves, are we the same as we are around others? What group might be surprised by your other behaviors?

I know in my own life, and I think for many of us, we want to compartmentalize our lives. We want Jesus in a box...a nice box, even a large box of our lives. But we also want a part of our lives in our personal box where Jesus really isn't invited in, maybe where we have secret or stubborn sins, maybe addictions, maybe just places that we've been wounded and we aren't willing to forgive yet or let God heal us, because we want the anger, we feed on it, we feel we need it. But that's not who we were made to be. My friends, we want to live lives of integrity, where there are no compartments, where every part of our lives is under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. It's my prayer today for myself and for you that we might grow in integrity.

Trust, love, integrity...surely there are more ways to become like Jesus, but these stand out today as we look at the basics of discipleship. If we follow in these three ways, others like kindness, patience, and self-control surely will follow.